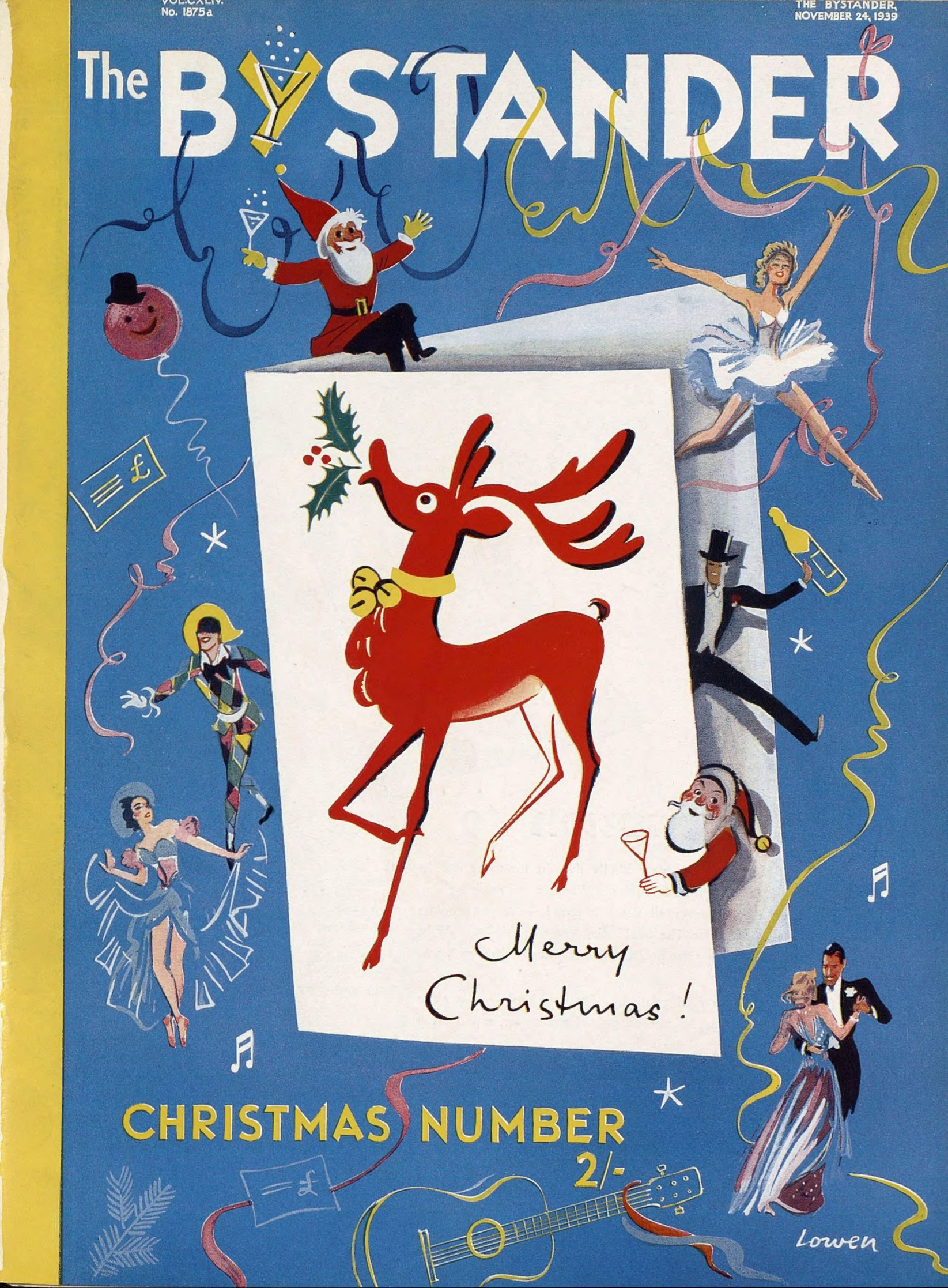
VOL. CXLIV.
No. 1875a

The BYSTANDER



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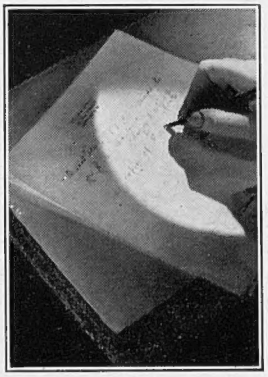

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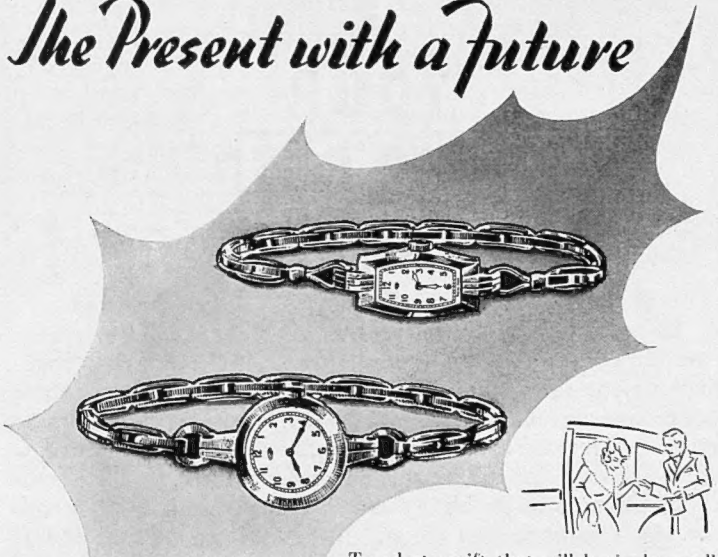

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Charities at Christmas

Some Deserving National Causes

Scattered, but as big as ever: *Dr. Barnardo's family of 8250 destitute children were all evacuated to safe areas on the outbreak of war*

FIRST among the Christmas charities at home that we urgently recommend you not to forget, however troubled the farther horizons, is Dr. Barnardo's Homes. Under their Charter "No destitute child ever refused admission," Dr. Barnardo's have in seventy-four years given a home to over 124,000 destitute children, and since the outbreak of war many children of men serving with the Forces have been helped by the Homes in their time of need.

Dr. Barnardo's Homes have been faced with some crippling bills since the outbreak of war. The cost of providing adequate air-raid shelters for their children, of blacking-out, of strengthening buildings, the increased prices of foodstuffs and other wartime contingencies have placed a heavy burden upon the resources of the Homes. Cheques, etc., should be crossed and made payable to Dr. Barnardo's Homes, at 74, Barnardo House, Stepney Causeway, E.1.

WAR between nations takes a heavy toll of life and resources: for this reason alone the other war being waged at home against cancer must be pursued unremittingly. The Royal Cancer Hospital must be victorious in its fight against this dread disease. Although a number of organisations decided to suspend activities, the work of treatment and research at the Royal Cancer Hospital was planned to continue unabated throughout the war. During the difficult times ahead, a gift, however small, will be welcome.

ANOTHER organisation carrying on unceasing research into the dread disease that took 74,000 human beings last year is the Imperial Cancer Research fund, whose patron is the King and whose president is Lord Halifax. Recently, new laboratories have been built and the endowment fund has become insufficient to cover expenditure; while the war added a heavy burden of complications and disorganisation. Donations, subscriptions and legacies, particularly the last, are urgently needed and should be sent to the hon. treasurer, c/o The Royal College of Surgeons, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.2.

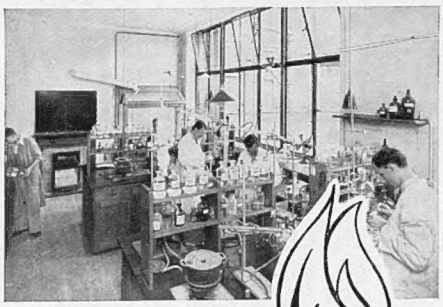
JOHN GROOM'S CRIPPLEAGE have at Edgware Way 208 crippled girls in training, in employment, and living in their village containing workrooms, showroom, hospital, church, and homes. The Clerkenwell branch being in the danger zone, a large number of the crippled workers were removed to Clacton, where workrooms were opened; this proved a costly but necessary move. The provision of an air-raid shelter at Edgware entailed an expenditure of £750. Economy without meanness is the watchword. Many cripples are waiting for admission. Donations are urgently needed and should be sent to John Groom's Crippleage and Flower-Girls' Mission, 37, Sekforde Street, E.C.1

THE DISTRESSED GENTLEFOLKS' AID ASSOCIATION was formed for the relief of gentle people who, owing to various causes, are in deep distress and in many cases on the verge of starvation. Unfortunately, the number of appeals from poor souls in urgent need of assistance has increased, while the funds available are reduced on account of the war. The Association appeals for help that assistance and perhaps a little comfort may be given to more of the many who have found poverty and sadness in their old age. Donations are gratefully received at 74, Brook Green, London, W.6.

OUR brave men of the Merchant Marine have been called upon to face the grave risks of torpedo and mine. When rescued, exhausted, their personal things lost—or worse, if they fail to return—everything possible must be done for them or their bereaved dependants. Again, as in 1914-18, the British Sailors' Society has brought the whole of its world-wide organisation to the aid of the seafarer. During the Great War the B.S.S. gave help and succour to more than 40,000 victims of submarine warfare from 1264 torpedoed and mined ships, and to their widows and dependants. Large quantities of parcels were sent to sailor prisoners of war in Germany at a cost of more than £52,000. Once again war has made your help essential to this organisation.

SPECIAL DEPARTMENTS OF THE ROYAL CANCER HOSPITAL

1



One of the Research Laboratories

Research

NOWHERE is the search for the cause and cure of Cancer prosecuted with greater vigour than in the Research Laboratories of The Royal Cancer Hospital. The nature of the scourge is investigated by many different methods—physical, chemical and biological. Certain chemical factors which may be concerned in the origin of Cancer are even now being examined. These compounds, first discovered in this Institute, are now in use in laboratories all over the world. This fight in the cause of humanity involves us in a heavy expenditure which must be met. We ask your help

The Royal Cancer Hospital
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DR. BARNARDO'S HOMES

IMPERIAL CANCER RESEARCH FUND

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Founded in 1902, under the direction of the Royal College of Physicians of London and the Royal College of Surgeons of England as a centre for research and information on cancer, The Imperial Cancer Research Fund is working unceasingly on the systematic investigation of the disease in man and animals. The work of this Fund and of other great centres of research has increased our knowledge of the origin and nature of cancer and has so altered our outlook that the disease is now curable in increasing numbers. Our previous accommodation has become too limited and **we have recently built new modern laboratories** to extend the scope of our investigations. The income from investments and the Endowment Fund is insufficient to cover the total annual expenditure, and help is urgently needed to meet the heavy additional cost of expansion.

Donations, Subscriptions and Legacies are earnestly solicited and should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, c/o Royal College of Surgeons of England, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C.2.

FORM OF BEQUEST.

I hereby bequeath the sum of £ to the Treasurer of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund under the direction of the Royal College of Physicians of London and the Royal College of Surgeons of England c/o Royal College of Surgeons of England, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, W.C.2, for the purpose of Scientific research and I direct that his receipt shall be a good discharge for such legacy.

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Keep it Handy

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Drink delicious **Ovaltine**

and note the Difference in your Nerve-Strength and Outlook

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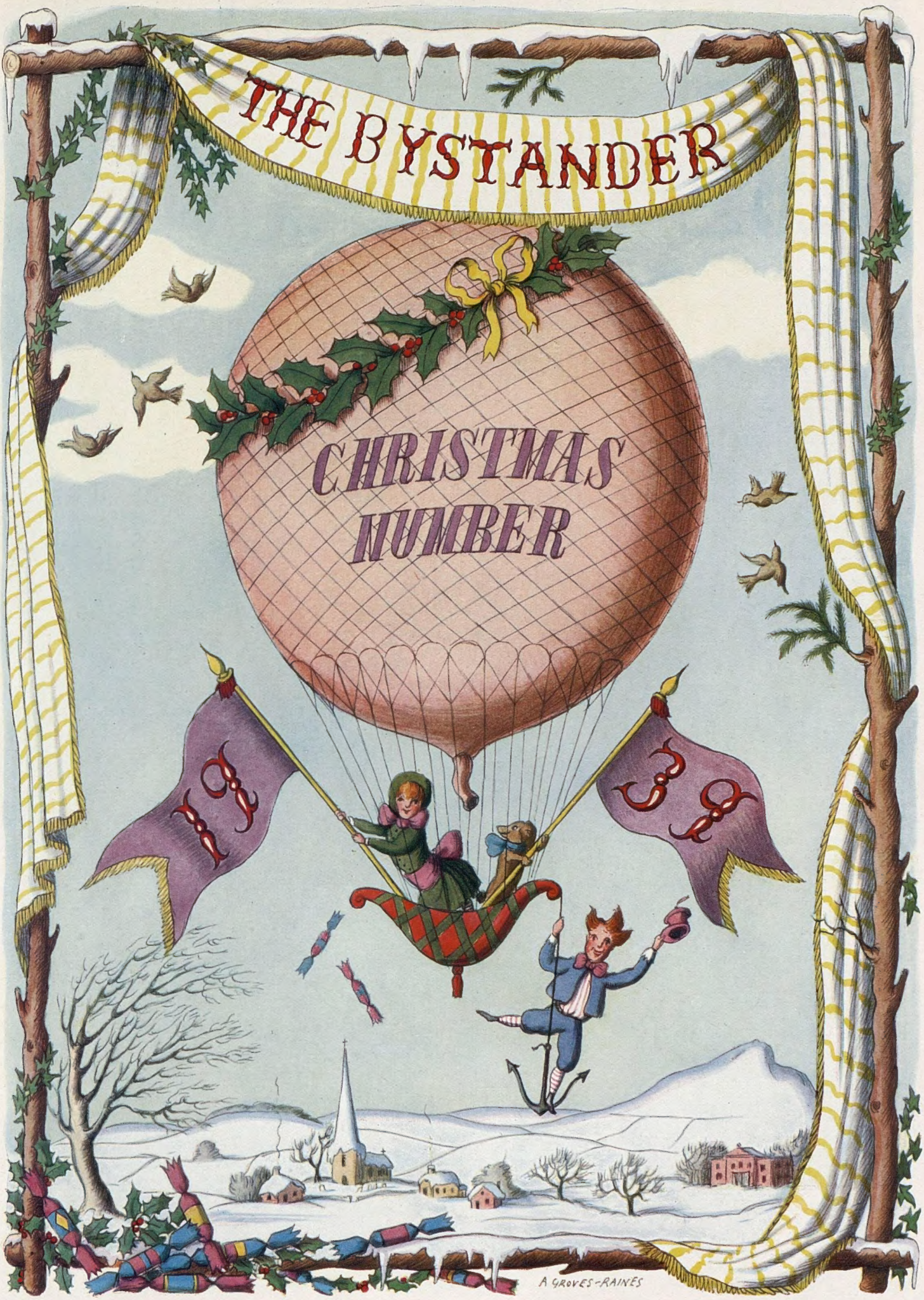

Gipsy Splendour: By Dame Laura Knight, R.A.

From the painting in this year's Royal Academy Exhibition

On Mrs. Brace's re-entry, wished her a happy Christmas

Christmas and Mr. Gibson

By Peter Traill

Illustrations by C. F. Tunnicliffe

MR. GIBSON'S woman-who-did-for-him came into his bedroom, or, rather, she advanced into it, because once she had made up her mind where her duty lay, she did it with a reckless abandon that is the mark of the brave, if foolhardy, company commander.

Mr. Gibson, lying in his narrow bed, had marked her progress down the passage from the moment when she had banged his breakfast-tray against the half-opened kitchen door to the moment when she had set it down wholeheartedly on the occasional-table outside his bedroom; and, lying on his back, had awaited her entry with as much enthusiasm as a prisoner awaits the warders on the morning of his execution. In the dim light, which filtered through the cracks in the curtains, he looked forlorn, with his narrow, unshaven face, and his tousled hair. But, as yet, he did not feel forlorn.

He felt, indeed, much as he did every morning when, restored to consciousness by the brisk sortie of the woman-who-did-for-him, he awaited his cup of tea and two slices of thin bread and butter, and allowed his mind to come gradually to its earthly anchorage. Small and unassuming, with large ears and a short nose, he looked like a rabbit, but there the resemblance ended, or Mr. Gibson thought it did, because he prided himself upon having a will of his own. That he did not exercise it more often, so that others, the woman-who-did-for-him, for instance, might be aware of the trueness of the temper of its steel, was due to the nice balance of his brain. Thus, he had meant to speak to the woman-who-did-for-him many times about many things, such as noise, overdone beef, and dust, but he argued with himself that a reprimand would only lead to an argument, and an argument, since he was in the right, would be followed by a loss of temper on her part, which, aided by malice, would lead in all probability to more noise, less gravy, and moths. By doing little or nothing about matters, he told himself that he daily won a glorious victory over her, for though the evils of which he knew mocked him, his line held steadfast in face of those of which he knew nothing, but which he guessed were horrible.

The woman-who-did-for-him, and whom he called Mrs. Brace, swept the curtains back along the pole with a fine free movement of her chapped hand and let in the day. Mr. Gibson closed his pale-blue eyes in face of the giant, revealed so overwhelmingly before him, and through the small aperture between the stubble wished her good morning. Mrs. Brace wished him the same, and, giving him a glance which she meant to be so impersonal that, if God on his Seat of Judgment had suddenly appeared in the window embrasure, he could have found no tittle of evidence against her of impropriety, she also wished him a merry Christmas.

Any variation from routine always caused Mr. Gibson to become wide awake. In his capacity of a servant in the Civil Service he appreciated the nature of routine, and a departure from it found him instantly on the alert. Sitting up in bed, his striped pyjama jacket open at the neck, he blinked at the open door through which Mrs. Brace had gone to get the tray; then he relapsed into a supine position again. Of course, it was Christmas Day. He had known it all the time, and his sister and brother-in-law, instead of remaining in town as was their custom, had taken his nephew to Switzerland to "let him have a bit of sun," and to make his first acquaintance with winter sports. All of which meant that Mr. Gibson hadn't to eat a heavy lunch, help in lighting the tree, wait for his presents to be handed to him all covered in fancy paper and fastened with coloured string, play round games, come back to change, and finish up in the evening with cold supper, paper hats, and more glasses of brandy than he was accustomed to take. Lying back and gazing at the ceiling, he told himself he was delighted, and, on Mrs. Brace's re-entry, wished her a happy Christmas. He didn't like the adjective merry; he didn't care much for happy; but he hated jolly, and any other word escaped him. He looked at Mrs. Brace, and hoped she would notice that he had substituted the compliment happy for merry; then he sighed, because it was plain that she had noticed nothing. He resolved to make no further immediate effort to make an intelligent woman out of her.

"When you 've had your bath," she said, as she put down the tray and kept her eyes on the bed-table, "I 'll make your bed; then I 'll get along."

Mr. Gibson raised himself on his elbow.

"Where are the papers?" he asked.

Mrs. Brace left the bedside abruptly and walked swiftly towards the door.

"No papers on Christmas Day," she said, and vanished, closing the bedroom door very firmly behind her, as if to shut in the devil. Mr. Gibson looked at his teapot. Of course, there were no papers on Christmas Day: there never were. Discovered in a mistake on a matter of routine, he felt that any previous advantage which he might have gained over Mrs. Brace had been lost. It was a depressing start for the day.

Shaved, and dressed in his black suit with thin white stripes, which he felt to be in keeping with the day, Mr. Gibson

handed Mrs. Brace her Christmas-box, as he called it, and hastened to escape from the flat. He did not want her to suspect that he had made no plans for the day, for that knowledge would have lent wings to Mrs. Brace's sympathy, and, since she prided herself on a kind heart, her sympathy was an awesome thing indeed. He had experienced it once when his sister had let out the news that their father had died, and again when he had cut his hand trying to open a tin of tongue. He left his flat, therefore, with every appearance of haste, muttering that he mustn't keep his friends waiting, and hurried along to the end of the street. Once the corner was turned, he slowed down his pace, and, as he looked idly at the lifeless shop windows where the tinsel winked at him, and jovial Father Christmases laughed at him, he thought about his lunch without enthusiasm, and, as he went along, seemingly without purpose, he hummed to himself " Barbara Allen."

Objectless as his stroll appeared to be, he found himself at length outside his sister's house, where he stood a moment, peering upwards from beneath his bowler hat, at the drawn blinds, and told himself again that he was glad she had gone to Switzerland. Then he walked away, but glanced backward once, just in case someone should come out of the house—Jean, the cook; or Ellen, the parlourmaid. But the front remained deserted, and he went forward a little quicker, and, as the ferrule of his rolled umbrella accompanied him with its hollow tap, he continued to hum " Barbara Allen " to himself.

Objectless still as his stroll appeared to be, he passed from Eaton Terrace, where his sister lived, and, crossing Belgrave Square, came to Wilton Crescent. Once there, his footsteps lagged again, and his eyes fixed themselves on a house a hundred paces away from him. He hoped that it was the right house, but the front of the crescent was fairly uniform and, from the distance, he could not really distinguish a particular portico. He told himself how curious it was that, whenever he had the leisure for a walk, he should find himself taking this route on his way to the park; but, then, as he also told himself, the object of a walk was to get exercise, and, if he went the shortest way, the exercise would be insufficient.

As he came opposite the door which he had been at such pains to differentiate, he stopped humming and, coming to a stop by the steps, gazed hard at the knocker. He would have run up and given it a resounding bang, if he didn't know that Barbara would be away. Sunday after Sunday he had informed himself exactly what he would do, but Barbara was always away for the week-ends, and so it would have been a waste of time. She and her husband had a cottage in the country, and they 'd be down there for Christmas just as they were down there every week-end. His pale-blue eyes stared at the large red door, and suddenly it opened.

At first, the group who stood in front of him was blurred: he could not distinguish the woman and the two children. They had no individuality, and, then, as the mist cleared from his eyes, he turned away violently. Behind him he heard a low voice.

He tried to collect his disordered thoughts while Barbara called her straying children to her side

" Arthur! " it exclaimed. " Be careful of the steps, Jane. Arthur! It is Arthur, isn't it? "

Mr. Gibson, frightened as much by the attention of a passer-by as anything else, turned back in his tracks hurriedly.

" Why, B-Barbara," he stammered. " I didn't see you. Honestly I didn't. I was just on my way," he went on more confidently, " on my way to have half a bottle with——"; he hesitated. The half a bottle sounded well, but he could not for the moment think of anyone with whom to have it. " Well, it doesn't matter who with," he continued. " You don't know him."

Barbara came down the steps, and her two children stayed near her, looking at Mr. Gibson as if he had fallen from the skies. She held out her hand to him, and Mr. Gibson, taking off his bowler, gave her his. He was conscious that she was looking at him, but he did not raise his eyes to hers. The oval face, with the grave dark-blue eyes, the broad forehead, the short upper-lip, the brown hair with the soft upward wave at the back, the straight carriage, the small feet, the slim legs; he told himself there was no reason to confirm particulars with which he was familiar. But Barbara looked at him and her grave eyes lit up with a kindly humour. Then she took her hand away.

" This is Mr. Gibson, children," she said. " You must wish him a happy Christmas."

" Happy Christmas," they dutifully repeated.

Mr. Gibson put his hat back on his head and tried a smile as he acknowledged their greetings.

" We were just going in the park," Barbara went on. " I 've given Nannie the day off. Ernest has had a go of 'flu; so we 've had to keep him in bed, haven't we? " she addressed her children.

" Yes," Jane answered eagerly, while her brother sucked his thumb. " But we 're going away to-morrow, aren't we? "

" I wondered why you weren't down

in the country," Mr. Gibson said, raising his eyes to her face at last. She was not looking at him, but was busy taking her son's thumb out of his mouth, and Mr. Gibson grasped his opportunity with eagerness. Reverently he scanned her features.

" It 's a long time since we 've seen you, Arthur," she said, straightening herself up.

" I 'm very busy," Mr. Gibson answered hastily, transferring his glance to the pavement. " Is Ernest very bad ? "

" Oh, no. He 's had a temperature, that 's all."

" That 's splendid," Mr. Gibson put in. " I mean splendid that he hasn't been really bad."

Barbara gave a hand to each child.

" I must take them in the park," she explained. " I don't expect you want to come, do you ? Oh, but there 's your half-bottle——"

" It 's all on my way," Mr. Gibson said hastily, and walked beside her as near as her son would allow. To think that he should be walking beside her ! He threw out his chest a little and grasped his umbrella firmly. It was a long time since he had walked with her, and she hadn't changed a bit ; the same effortless pace, the same well-poised head.

" We hardly ever seem to see you now, Arthur," she said. " D' you know, I believe I 've only seen you half-a-dozen times in half-a-dozen years. But then, they work you pretty hard, don't they ? "

" And you 're always away week-ends," Mr. Gibson answered quickly.

" Ernest likes to get out of town when he can," she said.

Together they guided the children across Knightsbridge and took them safely into the park.

" Jane looks very like you," Mr. Gibson said suddenly. He had seen a glimpse of Barbara's smile in her daughter, and, for him, that was quite sufficient. She herself favoured him with one, and at once the damp and grey day shed its depression. He felt suddenly lighthearted.

" My sister has taken her family to St. Moritz," he said.

" But you generally go to her for Christmas, don't you ? " Barbara answered.

" Generally," Mr. Gibson said. " It 's quite a change not to have to play bears or something equally strenuous. Fancy your remembering," he said, an added warmth in his tone.

" Your sister always used to rely on you ; she told me so. I saw her a week or so ago. She told me then she was going to Switzerland," Barbara replied.

" She never told me she had seen you," Mr. Gibson burst out. There was temper in his voice. To think that she had seen Barbara and not mentioned it !

" Oh, we only met in Harrods for a moment," Barbara said. " Anyway, it 's not a weighty piece of news, is it ? "

Mr. Gibson blinked.

" No, I suppose not," he admitted. " Still——" He stopped in confusion. Barbara appeared not to notice his embarrassment.

"You 're standing under the mistletoe, Arthur," she explained softly

" And what are you doing with yourself now that you are on the loose ? " she asked.

" Oh, I 've had a lot of invitations," Mr. Gibson assured her. " But, truth to tell," he went on with confidence, " I prefer a quiet time. I like to rest over public holidays. Roads and places and houses are so full, you know. One doesn't get any peace."

" I was going to ask you whether you 'd care to come in to us," Barbara went on. " I expect you 've got something else to do. Ernest 's still in bed, of course. I 'm afraid it 'll be a bit dull, and "—she pointed to the children—" not very quiet. But if you 've got nothing better to do, we should be delighted."

The world stood still for Mr. Gibson, and in the silence he heard the music of her voice; and her words tumbled about his head, as the letters on a child's bricks are mixed when it sweeps the word away. He tried to collect his disordered thoughts while Barbara called her straying children to her side.

" It 's very nice of you," he muttered. " Very kind of you. If you 're sure——"

" I 'm afraid the children 'll be a bit of a nuisance," Barbara broke in. " There 's a tree, you know ; and presents ; and they 'll be disappointed that Ernest isn't down to play with them."

" I 'll take Ernest's place," Mr. Gibson said hastily.

" You needn't do that," Barbara answered. " I 'll find something to keep them amused. You can have your after-lunch nap. I expect you like that."

" No, indeed," Mr. Gibson argued forcibly. To think that any man should sleep when Barbara was present !

They returned in time for lunch to Wilton Crescent, and Mr. Gibson drank a glass of sherry while he listened to Ernest's opinion of doctors, the Government, foreign affairs, and business in the City. He did not like Ernest ; he thought his opinions mostly nonsense, but Barbara had married him. He had never thought himself good enough for her. How could a woman such as Barbara be expected to take notice of a man with such modest achievements as his own ? But she had married Ernest, and there must be something in the man which was not apparent to a stranger. He wished Ernest well : he hoped he'd be fit enough to travel the next day. He told him so, and he went down the stairs after Barbara, admiring the way her hair curled at the back of her neck. To think that he should carve the turkey for her ! That he should see her at the end of the table ! He felt that it was his table, that Jane and Jack were his children, that to-morrow he would be going down into the country with them.

Expectantly he waited in the dining-room while the Christmas-tree was lighted. Excitedly he opened his one present from the tree ; a new tie which Barbara said she had meant to give her husband. Resolutely he played word-games with the children, and thankfully stayed on to supper " to eat up the bits," even though Ernest had previously announced that he was fed up with bed and was coming down, and coming, talked of doctors, the Government, foreign affairs, and business in the City.

It was time to go at last, and Ernest excused himself from seeing him off the premises on the plea of draughts, but Barbara, coming into the hall, handed him his bowler hat and umbrella.

As he stood in the open doorway, having wished her good night, his bowler hat on his head and his umbrella upon his arm, he turned again to look at her framed in the light from the hall, and, as she held the door open, she bent forward swiftly and kissed him. Then she laughed.

" You 're standing under the mistletoe, Arthur," she explained softly. " And you looked so like the White Rabbit, I couldn't help it," she explained. " But you had no gloves to forget."

The door closed slowly upon the oval face, the broad forehead, and the beautiful, smiling eyes, and Mr. Gibson stared at the panels. After all the years, Barbara had kissed him, and the softness of her lips remained with him as he started slowly to walk home.

He passed her house—by accident as he told himself—on Boxing Day, but the blinds were drawn. They had gone away, as Barbara had said they would, for a fortnight, to let Ernest recuperate in the country. The following day he was at work, and between the files and among the papers her face was interposed, while occasionally he rubbed his cheek where her lips had touched it. He thought of nothing else until his sister, back from Switzerland, asked him to dinner.

" I 'm sorry you were alone over Christmas, Arthur," she said. " I felt rather a pig about it."

" I preferred it, my dear," he answered stiffly.

" Nobody in town, I suppose ? " his brother-in-law put in hopefully.

" As a matter of fact, I ran into Barbara," Mr. Gibson answered in a very careful voice. " Lady Hatton, you know. I had a bite with them."

His sister looked at him pityingly.

" My poor Arthur," she said. " Children, trees and the rest of it. All the things you hate."

" Yes, it was a bit of a bore," Mr. Gibson acknowledged, pinching a piece of bread by his side until he had made a hard pellet of most of its inside, and in the polished surface of the table he seemed to see an oval face and he felt a longing to hum " Barbara Allen " over to himself.

THE END.

Meerkämper

The Snow Maiden: High Above Europe's Clashes, She Laughs

Lady Addle Remembers Christmas

Some further recollections from the Memoirs of Lady Addle of Eigg

By Mary Dunn

(Author of "Lady Addle Remembers")

Myself, aged 15

SEVENTY Christmases! What a number to look back upon! How many turkeys, how many plum puddings, how many—of latter years—bottles of bismuth? For we Coots all have the delicate digestions of the nobly bred—so different from these new peers who seem to be able to eat anything. Ah, times have sadly changed, I fear! My father, the thirteenth Earl Coot, was—except during the hunting season—a martyr to gout; my dear mother was a prey to dyspepsia, while I am told that a great-aunt, Lady Francis Twynge, was invariably known to her household as "Flatulent Fanny"—not a very pretty soubriquet, I am afraid, but I merely mention it in order to show that in the days of the old régime it wasn't *comme il faut* to possess stomachs of leather. Not, of course, that we considered them in any way; these modern diets and light feeding would have been thought shocking form. One should eat—and one should suffer afterwards. That was the rule of society. I remember one year when the boar's head was so enormous that one of the footmen carrying it slipped beneath its gigantic weight and twisted his ankle—what a triumph for a Christmas dish!—while our guests frequently had to retire to their rooms after two or three days of the famous Coots Balder fare.

As a contrast, I lunched last Boxing Day with a mushroom peer of some three or four generations, and what did I find? He and his wife both drank beer, with the wireless blaring through the meal, entirely destroying digestion, one would have said, and afterwards played squash rackets against their son and daughter and *beat them*! In my day parents had the dignity to remain immovable upon the sofa under their *couvre-pied*, after meals. But I mustn't digress.

CHRISTMAS! Such a blessed season. When I was asked to write this article my first thought was: "Now I shall be able to share with the world the great joy of those old happy Christmases at Coots Balder"—the deep, crisp snow—we would never have dreamt of having Christmas without snow in those days—the presents all done up in coloured tissue-paper, rather an original idea of my dear mother's, and then, of course, the preparations beforehand, which were half the fun. My sister Mipsie[1] was the artistic one and always used to decorate the house by putting little bits of holly behind the pictures. Sometimes they fell down and we had to put them up again, which was very exciting. Sometimes my brother Humpo[2], who was always an incorrigible practical joker, would put a holly leaf or two inside the visitors' pillow-slips, and one cousin of ours, Edith Twynge, who was somewhat nervous of snakes, thought, on putting her face to the pillow, that she had been stung by an adder (we had told her that one had got loose in the house), and gave a loud shriek. How we all roared! We were waiting outside her door, of course, hoping that something of the sort would happen. Then there was the staff dance on the day after Boxing Day, and that was always a great excitement. Turbot, our dear old butler, would lead out Mamma, while Papa would do about one turn round the room with Mrs. Gulp, the housekeeper, and then stand for a while watching the gay scene. Papa was very democratic on these occasions and would often insist on dancing with the quite young maids instead of keeping to the upper servants. People talk about class distinctions nowadays. I 'm sure we didn't even know what the word meant. I well remember, when I was about six, being sent to bed soon after one of those dear old staff parties had started, and finding Papa sitting on a settee in an alcove on the stairs, with the third kitchen-maid on his knee. She jumped up when she saw me, and Papa said: "There, run away, my child," and went on to tell me that

My mother and father, Lord and Lady Coot

[1] Millicent, Duchess of Brisket.

[2] The Hon. Humphrey Coot.

he felt like a father to all his employees. If only that same delightful relationship existed between the classes nowadays, how much better it would be!

BUT to return to Christmas: which, I wonder, shall I recount, from the first that I opened my baby eyes upon to look beyond the white goffered frill of my pillow to the snow which would have been whiter than any linen except ours? All our Christmases were so wonderful that it is difficult to pick out any outstanding ones. There was the exciting one when we made a snowman and—we were very imaginative children always—put a pipe in its mouth and a hat on its head; and the dreadful one when my elder sister Soppy[3] fell through the ice in her hip-bath and I only just managed to pull her out in time before she would have caught a bad cold; and there was the time when we children dressed up the Yule log to look like Grandpapa (the Duke of Droitwich, my mother's father) and put it on his favourite sofa so that Grandmama, who was a little shortsighted, spent an hour and a half reading the *Church Times* to it. It was very naughty of us, of course, and we were severely punished afterwards by not being allowed to keep the half-sovereign in the plum-pudding and having to give it to foreign missions instead. But youth is youth all the world over, as I always say.

Grandpapa, the Duke of Droitwich, in 1885

Right: Grandmama, the Duchess of Droitwich, 1895

PERHAPS the most thrilling of all, however, was my fifteenth in 1895—that fateful Christmas when the destinies of Europe might have been changed by a fourth footman's mistake, when the peace and goodwill between two great nations was saved by the graciousness of one woman's loving sympathy. That woman was my beautiful mother, Lady Coot.

We were a particularly gay and festive party that year, I remember. The snow, of course, as usual lay thick upon the ground, the robins' breasts were specially red. Inside all was warmth and good cheer; the tables and footmen groaning beneath the dishes, the crackling of the estate logs, like great trees, vying with the gay voices of my aunts, peace and plenty in the dining-room and quite as much as was good for them in the servants' hall. My sister Soppy was just engaged to Lord Hogshead—"Hog," as we all affectionately called him—and my dare-devil brother Humpo was so funny that we never stopped laughing; he kept asking them if they had seen the mistletoe! As for Mipsie, who was then an exquisite little girl of twelve, she was the darling of all—sitting on every knee in turn and begging for the jewellery out of everyone's crackers. Later in life, when she was given so much jewellery by her husbands and innumerable friends, I often used to think that it was the little child in her coming out in the woman—that exceptional love of diamonds.

AS a family our ways have a ways lain in high places; before I was six I had been bathed with four future ambassadors and one papal nuncio. I have played peep-bo with kings. It is not unnatural, therefore, that when my father met the Great Moc of Montenegro at Cannes and invited his two small sons, the Nougat and the Moccassin, who had just gone to school in England, to Coots Balder for Christmas, it entirely slipped his memory, and when the two princes arrived, leaving their cab a little distance from the house owing to the impassable snow, and rang the great brass bell which had been rung by so many famous people (or rather, by their grooms), there were no preparations for their visit, and they were mistaken for beggars. But such was the hospitable rule of the house that they were not turned away without first being given a glass of rich skimmed milk and a large bag of crusts from the selfsame loaves that came up to the dining-room—no class snobbery for us Coots.

Mipsie, aged 12

The Nougat and the Moccassin, believing this to be an old English custom for guests, waited, with, I must admit, excellent manners for foreigners, for an hour and a half, and then rang again. This time, the butler and three of the footmen being occupied with serving dinner, the doors were thrown open by a young footman, Albert, who, hearing the Nougat in his picturesque broken English say, "We waits," very naturally understood him to mean that the two princes were carol singers. Even the footmen, however, learnt sympathy from the sweet example of my mother, and Albert was no exception to the rule. Seeing the two little boys standing stiff and blue with cold, his kindly plebeian heart warmed towards them, and after scarcely thirty minutes more delay, while he assisted in serving the sweet, he informed my father that two waits were at the front door.

[3] Lady Sophia Coot, afterwards Viscountess Hogshead.

Papa, who was in the best of spirits, as he so often was for some reason towards the end of dinner, replied wittily, "Waits? Let them wait then!"—he was always the best company of any man I ever met—but we children clapped our hands and begged that the boys might be brought in to sing to us in the dining-room, which request, after some demur, was granted, and about twenty minutes later the two young princes walked stiffly into the room, so covered with snow and rime that I remember my grandmother gave a little shriek when she saw great crusts of it, some not too clean, fall on to the priceless Persian carpet. But before any comment could be made there was an unexpected interruption. The Nougat, presumably overcome by the change in temperature, suddenly went down on the floor as if he had been pole-axed.

My beautiful mother

WHAT a contretemps! But never shall I forget my dear mother's noble and intuitive action in that awkward moment. Realising almost instantly that the boy must have fainted, she ordered the footman to pick him up and lay him on the sofa, having first sent for a dust-sheet to put beneath him. She could have done no more for one of her own children (except, of course, that the dust-sheet would have been unnecessary).

This being done, it remained to decide what was the next step, and a discussion ensued in which my father, who was naturally annoyed at the disturbance in the middle of dessert, insisted that the boys must be put back outside the door until dinner was finished, my grandmother, who had a rooted objection to strangers from hygienic reasons, supporting him and my mother arguing that it might possibly be unkind to replace them in the drive—at any rate, until the elder boy had recovered. Meanwhile, we children listened with open mouths and round eyes, eager for any excitement.

Suddenly I had an idea. All this time the Moccassin had been pouring a stream of rapid Montenegran into our ears, to which we had paid little attention, believing it to be merely a local dialect. But now, on a sudden, something strange in his intonation struck me, and instantly the truth swept over me.

"Mama!" I said, breathlessly. "I believe they are foreigners!"

Myself, with my two sisters, Soppy and Mipsie

Well, then, of course, the fat *was* in the fire! Papa and Grandmama redoubled their objections, Mama went white to the lips, and even my grandfather, who—dear, saintly old man—had sat quietly at the dining table all the time, smiling in his sleep, now stirred and joined his protests to the others. But something about their insistence seemed to strengthen Mama's will. I can see her now, her sweet face shining with spirituality and soap—she scorned the use of powder—one hand pointing upwards to the beautiful crystal chandelier.

"George," she said earnestly, "even if they were blacks we ought to remember that they are also His children who are committed to our care at Christmastide. It is not their fault that they are foreigners. Our duty is clear—they must be allowed to sleep in the scullery. Besides," she added with one of her rare, roguish smiles, "we are rather short-handed, and no doubt they will be glad to earn their keep by helping in the kitchen."

Papa was a very reserved man, but it was clear that he was moved by the appeal, though beyond a grunt of assent and a curt order to Humpo to ring the bell for Turbot, he gave no signs of emotion. But I have always been of an observant nature, and I noticed that he went back to the table and poured himself out a fourth glass of port, an invariable sign with him of excitement, boredom, pleasure, displeasure, good spirits, depression, or irritation.

NOW comes the strange part of the story—really it is just like a detective book, which I have always felt I could write if I tried. Instead of Turbot answering the summons instantly as he usually did, there was a delay of a few minutes. But just as it seemed we could all bear the suspense no longer and that someone must ring again, he appeared—but looking so different that for a moment we were all taken aback. He had on a long crimson robe edged with fur, with an enormous hood, and a beautiful white beard! Then he took off the beard and, of course, the mystery was explained.

It was the custom at Coots Balder for the butler to dress up as Father Christmas every year and fill our stockings, as it was obviously impossible for Papa to do so without clashing with either his port or his after-dinner liqueur or his nightcap of brandy-and-soda. On this occasion Turbot had been trying on his costume—he told me afterwards that he had wanted to see how a new beard suited him: he was always conscientious to a fault—when he was summoned peremptorily to the dining-room and had no time to change.

I am not sure if I believed in Father Christmas then or not. I was a particularly imaginative and romantic child—we Coots have Irish blood in us, and I often fancy I must have kissed the Blarney Stone myself—but at the same time I was, I think, unusually intelligent and

(Concluded on page 80)

The Cracked Record

THESE — ARE

"The Body in the Bottle Club"

"Does Poultry Keeping Pay?"

"Aunt Bessie's Cookery Book"

"With Bike and Billycan in the Cotswolds"

THE AUTHORS of—

"Pre-Restoration Church Plate"

"The Amours of Yvonne"

"Two-Gun Pete of Slaughter Gulch"

"Mad about the Ballet"

Happy Christmas

By Charles Birkin

Illustrations by Holland

Ashley's voice when he was talking to Audrey was much too caressing

KATHERINE felt that her visit had started altogether too well. The evening on which she had arrived had proved a striking personal triumph. She had held the floor and the conversation, and had even been successful in silencing Miss Audrey Frazer—in itself no mean achievement. But even while she savoured her success she was haunted by the fear that during the days to come her joie de vivre must inevitably die down.

It was, in her case, she told herself, fatal to begin a visit with too great a bang. It was not that she was incapable of keeping it up, or that her reserves of enjoyment and entertainment were in any way limited, but she always, in the end, became too tired. Suddenly. Like that.

She had been to Staed for two days, and four more, over the Christmas holidays, loomed menacingly ahead. Ashley, she knew, was by way of being enchanted by her. In fact, she thought that at the moment she was well in front of Audrey in his affections. But she had an uneasy suspicion that Audrey was playing a waiting game, and that she knew the exact extent of her, Katherine's, stamina, and was relaxing until a timely moment should present itself.

Katherine thrust aside these unpleasant reflections and, sitting back on her heels, frowned at the litter of wrapping-papers, holly-ribbon and tinsels that cluttered her bedroom floor. She glanced at the list of presents and recipients which she had made so painstakingly before embarking upon her Christmas shopping and which were now failing so lamentably to tally. She had taken the necessary precaution of asking Ashley whom he had invited for the festive season, but in the meantime the house-party had undergone many deletions and additions, and, as usual, Katherine found herself the unwilling donor of ill-chosen gifts to a horde of people who were themselves in precisely the same quandary. She glared again at the pencilled columns, of which the majority of the entries were by now, for better or for worse, either scratched out or with a seemingly light-hearted tick beside them.

Only three remained to be filled in: Audrey, Jim Panton, Hermione Granger. Of course she had not known until too late that Hermione was going to be there. And she would not be able to palm off one of the tokens of esteem that she would herself receive, as at Staed all tributes were exchanged over the breakfast table. Her forehead wrinkled with perplexity. What "spares" had she had the foresight to bring with her? Firstly, there was a copy of *Satire*, by Howard Carleton. Then a large jar of particularly delicious pink bath-salts which she had intended keeping for herself; and lastly a broad leather belt. She supposed that Jim must have the belt, although it was cissy, and he would never wear it: Hermione could have the book, and the odious Audrey the bath-salts. It would be no good giving her *Satire*, as she had noticed her reading a copy of it before luncheon. Katherine sighed.

"Oh, well . . . nothing is perfect," she said aloud. It was a hangover of memory from a Miss Goll, her music teacher of an earlier decade.

With an ill grace she rolled the bath-salts in a tricoloured wrapping. On the label she wrote, "To dear Audrey, with love from Katherine."

From below her window she heard the voices of the carol-singers, "Peace on earth and mercy mild," which had hitherto never failed to fill her with the right Christmas spirit.

KATHERINE had eaten far too much. She felt slightly sick and slothful and dull, and she had a headache. She also had a hole in her stocking and was altogether very disgruntled by the turn of events.

She had, as usual, given by far better presents than she had received. Hermione had given her nothing at all, and Audrey had handed her a handkerchief which Katherine considered was not virgin to the laundry, and which was of an unpleasing shade of chartreuse. It had "Ne me touchez pas" printed all over it in letters of varying sizes, and Katherine regarded it with acute distaste. Ashley, it was true, had produced an expensive Cartier evening bag, which she intended to change, but the remainder of her fellow guests had proved to be both unimaginative and decidedly economical. Also, it had now begun to rain, and she had left her book in her bedroom and felt too lazy to go up and get it. The heartier members of the house-party had braved the elements in mackintoshes; and Ashley, Hermione, Audrey and Ashley's mother were engrossed in playing bridge by the fire at the other end of the room. Both Audrey and Ashley were extremely able players. During deals she heard snatches of their conversation. Ashley was asking Audrey if she were hunting on the following day, and she replied that she most certainly was, and moreover, was looking forward to it immensely. They were both, again, excellent riders. Katherine hated and feared horses, which she regarded as her natural enemies; and she did not care at all for Ashley's tone of voice when he was talking to Audrey: it was much too caressing.

(Concluded on page 78)

Inspired with malicious life, it slipped from her fingers

Dewar's

"White Label"

SCOTCH WHISKY

"It's a Gift, sir!"

The Staffordshire Highlands

By Doris Zinkeisen

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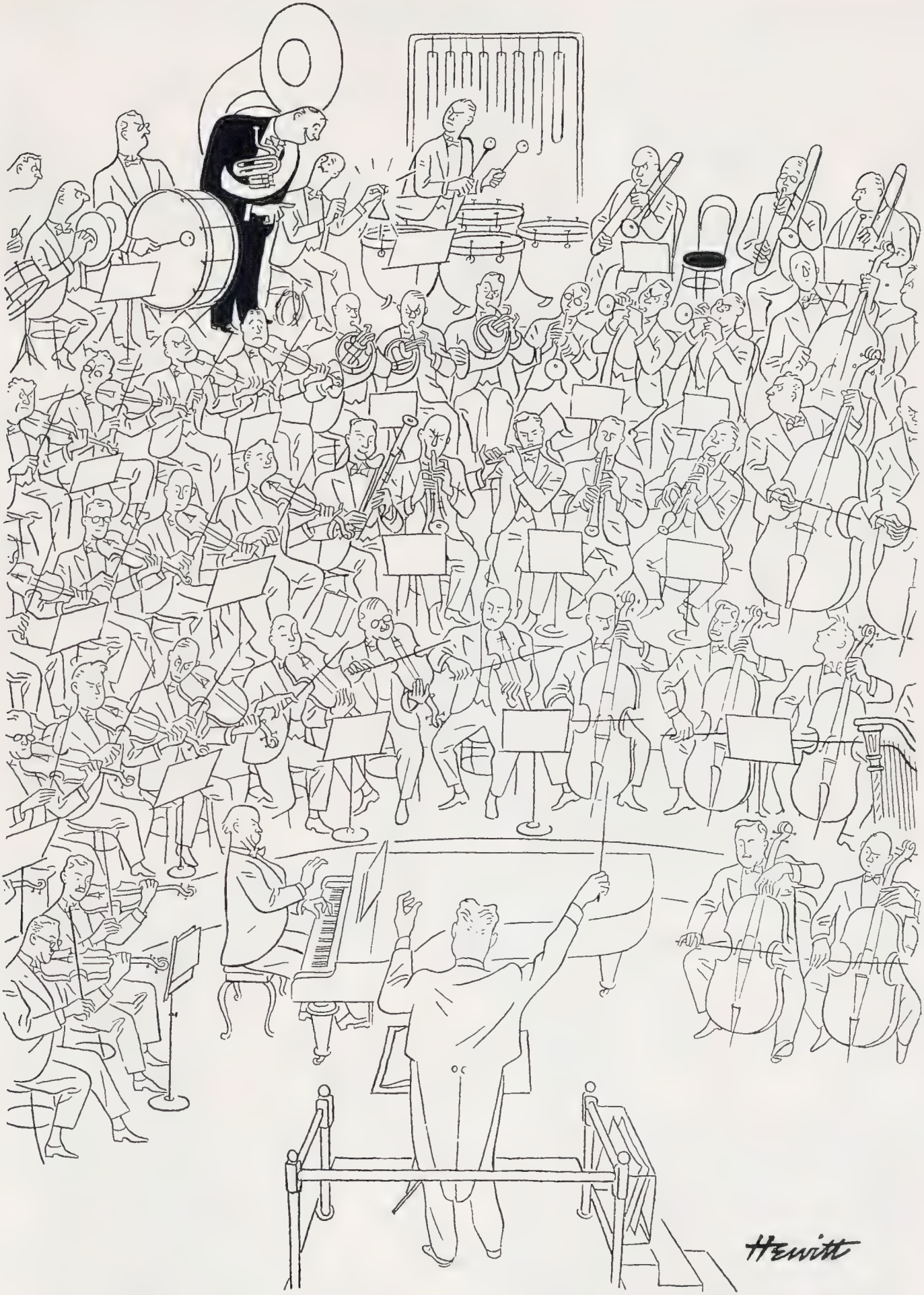


"I've always wanted to play one of those things"

Bottle Party

By

John Collier

Illustrations by Eric Fraser

FRANKLIN FLETCHER dreamed of luxury in the form of tiger-skins and beautiful women. He was prepared, at a pinch, to forgo the tiger-skins. Unfortunately, the beautiful women seemed equally rare and inaccessible. At his office and at his boarding-house the girls were mere mice, or were puddingy girls, or swarthy, or had not sufficiently read the advertisements. He met no others. At thirty-five he gave up, and decided he must console himself with a hobby, which is a very miserable second-best.

He prowled about in odd corners of the town, looking in at the windows of antique dealers and junk shops, wondering what on earth he might collect. He came upon a poor shop, in a poor alley, in whose dusty window stood a single object: it was a full-rigged ship in a bottle. Feeling rather like that himself, he decided to go in and ask the price.

The shop was small and bare. Some shabby racks were ranged about the walls, and these racks bore a large number of bottles, of every shape and size, containing a variety of objects whose only interest was how they had ever got there. While Franklin still looked about, a little door opened,

and out shuffled the proprietor, a wizened old man in a smoking-cap, who seemed mildly surprised and mildly pleased to have a customer.

He showed Franklin bouquets and birds of paradise and the battle of Gettysburg and miniature Japanese gardens, and even a shrunken human head, all stoppered up in bottles. "And what," said Frank, "are those, down there on the bottom shelf?"

"They are not much to look at," said the old man. "A lot of people think they are all nonsense. Personally, I like them."

He lugged out a few specimens from their dusty obscurity. One seemed to have nothing but a little dried-up fly in it; others contained what might have been horse-hairs or straws, or mere wisps of heaven knows what; some appeared to be filled with grey or opalescent smoke. "They are," said the old man, "various sorts of genie, djinns, sibyls, dæmons, and such things. Some of them, I believe, are much harder, even, than a full-rigged ship, to get into a bottle."

"Oh, but come! This is New York," said Frank.

"All the more reason," said the old man, "to expect the most extraordinary djinns in bottles. I will show you. Wait a moment. The stopper is a little stiff."

"What is this one like?" asked Frank.

"This one," said the old man, desisting in his efforts, and holding the bottle up to the light. "This one—good heavens! My eyes are getting weak. I very nearly undid the wrong bottle. A very ugly customer indeed. Dear me! It's just as well I didn't get that stopper undone. I'd better put him right back in the rack. I must remember he's in the back right-hand corner. I'll stick a label on him one of these days. Here's something more harmless."

"What's in that?" said Frank.

"Supposed to be the most beautiful girl in the world," said the old man. "All right if you like that sort of thing. Myself, I've never troubled to undo her. I'll find something more interesting."

"Well, from a scientific point of view," said Frank, "I——"

"No. No," said the old man. "Talking of science, look at this." He held up one which contained a tiny, mummified, insect-looking object, just visible through the grime. "Put your ear to it," he said.

Frank did so. He heard, in a sort of whistling nothing of a voice, the words, "Louisiana Lad, Saratoga, four-fifteen. Louisiana Lad, Saratoga, four-fifteen," repeated over and over again.

"What on earth is that?" said he.

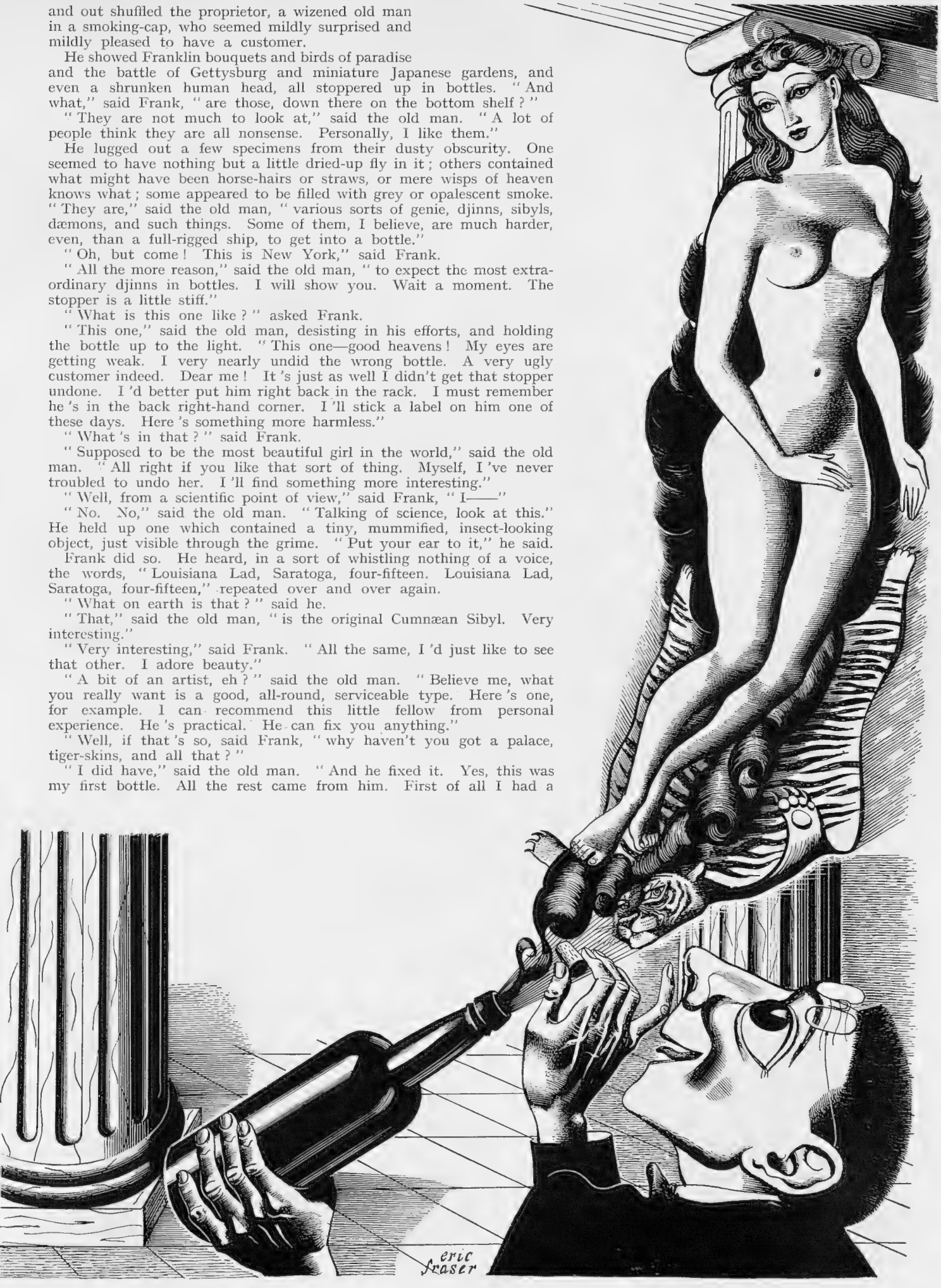
"That," said the old man, "is the original Cumnæan Sibyl. Very interesting."

"Very interesting," said Frank. "All the same, I'd just like to see that other. I adore beauty."

"A bit of an artist, eh?" said the old man. "Believe me, what you really want is a good, all-round, serviceable type. Here's one, for example. I can recommend this little fellow from personal experience. He's practical. He can fix you anything."

"Well, if that's so, said Frank, "why haven't you got a palace, tiger-skins, and all that?"

"I did have," said the old man. "And he fixed it. Yes, this was my first bottle. All the rest came from him. First of all I had a



palace, pictures, marbles, slaves. And, as you say, tiger-skins. I had him put Cleopatra on one of them."

"What was she like?" cried Frank.

"All right," said the old man, "if you like that sort of thing. I got bored with it. I thought to myself, 'What I'd like, really, is a little shop, with all sorts of things in bottles.' So I had him fix it. He got me the Sibyl. He got me that ferocious fellow there. In fact, he got me the lot."

"And now he's in there?" said Frank.

"Yes. He's in there," said the old man. "Listen to him."

Frank put his ear to the bottle. He heard, uttered in the most plaintive tones, "Let me out! Do let me out. Please let me out. I'll do anything. Let me out. I'm harmless. Please let me out. Just for a little while. Do let me out. I'll do anything. Please . . ."

Frank looked at the old man. "He's there all right," he said. "He's there."

"Of course he's there," said the old man. "I wouldn't sell you an empty bottle. What do you take me for? In fact, I wouldn't sell this one at all, for sentimental reasons, only I've had the shop a good many years now, and you're my first customer."

Frank put his ear to the bottle again. "Let me out! Let me out! Oh, please let me out! I'll——." "I say," said Frank. "Does he go on like that all the time?"

"Very probably," said the old man. "I can't say I listen."

"It seems rather tough," said Frank sympathetically.

"Maybe," said the old man. "They don't seem to like bottles. Personally, I do. They fascinate me. For example, I——"

"Tell me," said Frank. "Is he really harmless?"

"Oh, yes," said the old man. "Bless you, yes. Some say they're tricky—Eastern blood and all that—I never found him so. I used to let him out: he'd do his stuff; then back he'd go again. I must say, he's very efficient."

"He could get me anything?"

"Absolutely anything."

"And how much do you want for him?" said Frank.

"Oh, I don't know," said the old man. "Ten million dollars, perhaps."

"I say! I haven't got that. Still, if he's as good as you say, I could pay you on the instalment system."

"Don't worry. Give me five bucks. I've got all I want, really. Shall I wrap him up for you?"

Frank paid over his five bucks, and hurried home with the precious bottle, terrified of breaking it. As soon as he was in his room he pulled out the stopper. Out flowed a prodigious quantity of greasy smoke, which immediately solidified into the figure of a gross and fleshy Oriental, six-feet-six in height, with rolls of fat, a hook nose, a wicked white to his eye, vast double chins, altogether like a film producer, only larger. Frank, striving desperately for something to say, ordered Shashlik, Kebab, and Turkish Delight. These were immediately forthcoming.

Frank, having recovered his balance, noted that these modest offerings were of surpassing quality, and set upon dishes of solid gold, superbly engraved, and polished to a dazzling brightness. It is by little details of this description that one may recognise a really first-rate servant. Frank was delighted, but restrained his enthusiasm. "Gold plates," said he, "are all very well. Let us, however, get down to brass tacks. I should like a palace."

"To hear," said his dusky henchman, "is to obey."

"It should," said Frank, "be of suitable size, suitably situated, suitably furnished, suitable pictures, suitable marbles, hangings, and all that. I should like there to be a large number of tiger-skins. I am very fond of tiger-skins."

"They shall be there," said his slave.

"I am," said Frank, "a bit of an artist, as your late owner remarked. My art, so to speak, demands the presence, upon these tiger-skins, of a number of young women, some blonde, some brunette, some petite, some Junoesque, some languorous, some vivacious, all beautiful, and they need not be over-dressed. I hate over-dressing. It is vulgar. Have you got that?"

"I have," said the djinn.

"Then," said Frank, "let *me* have it."

"Condescend only," said his servant, "to close your eyes for the space of a single minute, and opening them you shall find yourself surrounded by the agreeable objects you have described."

"O.K.," said Frank. "But no tricks, mind!"

He closed his eyes as requested: a low, musical, humming, whooshing sound rose and fell about him. At the end of the minute he looked around: there were the arches, pillars, marbles, hangings, etc., of the most exquisite palace imaginable, and wherever he looked he saw a tiger-skin, and on every tiger-skin there reclined a young woman of surpassing beauty, who was certainly not vulgarly over-dressed.

Our good Frank was, to put it mildly, in an ecstasy. He darted to and fro like a honey-bee in a florist's shop. He was received everywhere with smiles sweet beyond description, and with glances of an open or a veiled responsiveness. Here were blushes and lowered lids. Here was the flaming face of ardour. Here was a shoulder turned, but by no means a cold shoulder. Here were open arms, and such arms! Here was love dissembled, but vainly dissembled. Here was love triumphant. "I must say," said Frank at a later hour, "I have spent a really delightful afternoon. I have enjoyed it thoroughly."

"Then may I crave," said the djinn, who was at that moment serving him his supper, "may I crave the boon of being allowed to act as your butler, and as general minister to your pleasures, instead of being returned to that abominable bottle?"

"I don't see why not," said Frank. "It certainly seems rather tough that, after having fixed all this up, you should be crammed back into the bottle again. Very well, act as my butler, but understand, whatever the convention may be, I wish you never to enter a room without knocking. And above all—no tricks."

The djinn, with a soapy smile of gratitude, withdrew, and Frank shortly retired to his harem, where he passed the evening as pleasantly as he had passed the afternoon.

Some weeks went by, entirely filled with these agreeable pastimes, till Frank, in obedience to a law which not even the most efficient of djinns can set aside, found himself growing a little over-particular, a little blasé, a little inclined to criticise and find fault.

"These," said he to his djinn, "are very pretty young creatures, if you like that sort of thing, but I imagine they can hardly be first-rate, or I should feel

more interest in them. I am, after all, a connoisseur : nothing can please me but the very best. Take them away. Roll up all the tiger-skins but one."

"It shall be done," said the djinn. "Behold, it is accomplished."

"And on that remaining tiger-skin," said Frank, "put me Cleopatra herself."

The next moment Cleopatra was there, looking, it must be admitted, absolutely superb. "Hullo!" she said. "Here I am, on a tiger-skin again!"

"*Again!*" cried Frank, suddenly reminded of the old man in the shop. "Here! Take her back. Bring me Helen of Troy."

Next moment, Helen of Troy was there. "Hullo!" she said. "Here I am, on a tiger-skin again!"

"*Again!*" cried Frank. "Damn that old man! Take her away. Bring me Queen Guinevere."

Guinevere said exactly the same thing : so did la Pompadour, Lady Hamilton, and every other famous beauty that Frank could think of. "No wonder," said he, "that that old man was such an extremely wizened old man! The old fiend! The old devil! He has properly taken the gilt off all the gingerbread. Call me jealous, if you like. I will not play second fiddle to that ugly old rascal. Where shall I find a perfect creature, worthy of the embraces of such a connoisseur as I am?"

"If you are deigning to address that question to me," said the djinn, "let me remind you that there was, in that shop, a little bottle which my late master had never unstoppered, because I supplied him with it after he had lost interest in matters of this sort. Nevertheless, it has the reputation of containing the most beautiful girl in the whole world."

"You are right," cried Frank. "Get me that bottle without delay."

In a few seconds the bottle lay before him. "You may have the afternoon off," said Frank to the djinn.

"Thank you," said the djinn. "I will go and see my family in Arabia. I have not seen them for a long time.' With that he bowed and withdrew. Frank turned his attention to the bottle, which he was not long in unstoppering.

Out came the most beautiful girl one could possibly imagine. Cleopatra and all that lot were hags and frumps compared with her. "Where am I?" said she. "What is this beautiful palace? What am I doing on a tiger-skin? Who is this handsome young prince?"

"It 's me!" cried Frank, in a rapture. "It 's me!"

The afternoon passed like a moment in Paradise. Before Frank knew it the djinn was back, ready to serve up supper. Frank must sup with his charmer, for this time it was love, the real thing. The djinn, entering with the viands, rolled up his wicked eyes at the sight of so much beauty.

It happened that Frank, all love and restlessness, darted out into the garden between two mouthfuls, to pluck his beloved a rose. The djinn, on the pretence of serving her wine, edged up very closely. "I don't know if you remember me," said he in a whisper. "I used to be in the next bottle to you. I have often admired you through the glass."

"Oh, yes," said she. "I remember you to perfection."

At that moment Frank returned. The djinn could say no more, but he stood about the room, inflating his monstrous chest, and showing off his plump and dusky muscles. "You need not be afraid of him," said Frank. "He is only a djinn. Pay no attention to him. Tell me if you really love me."

"Of course I do," said she, rather absent-mindedly.

"Well, say so," said he. "Why don't you say so?"

"I *have* said so," said she. "Of course I do. Isn't that saying so?"

This vague, evasive reply dimmed all Frank's happiness as if a cloud had come over the sun. Doubt sprang up in his mind, and entirely ruined moments of exquisite bliss.

"What are you thinking of?" he would say.

"I don't know," she would reply.

"Well, you ought to know," he would say, and then a quarrel would begin.

Once or twice he even ordered her back into her bottle. She obeyed with a malicious and secretive smile.

"Why should she give that sort of smile?" said Frank to the djinn, to whom he confided his distress.

"I cannot tell," replied the djinn. 'Unless she has a lover concealed."

"Is it possible?" cried Frank in consternation.

"It is surprising," said the djinn, "how much room there is in one of these bottles."

"Come out!" cried Frank. "Come out at once!"

His charmer obediently emerged. "Is there anyone else in that bottle?" cried Frank.

"How could there be?" she asked, with a look of rather overdone innocence.

"Give me a straight answer," said he. "Answer me yes or no."

"Yes or no," she replied maddeningly.

"Hell and fury!" cried Frank. "I 'll go in and find out for myself! If I find anybody, God help him and you!"

With that, and with an intense effort of the will, he flowed himself into the bottle. He looked all round : there was no one. Suddenly he heard a sound above him. He looked up, and there was the stopper being thrust in.

"What are you doing?" cried he.

"We are putting in the stopper," said the djinn.

Frank cursed, begged, prayed and implored. "Let me out!" he cried. "Let me out! Please let me out. Do let me out. I 'll do anything. Let me out, do."

The djinn, however, had other matters to attend to. Frank had the infinite mortification of beholding these other matters through the glassy walls of his prison. Next day he was picked up, whisked through the air, and deposited in the dirty little shop, among the other bottles, from which this one had never been missed.

There he remained for an interminable period, covered all over with dust, and frantic with rage at the thought of what was going on in his exquisite palace between his djinn and his faithless charmer. In the end, some sailors happened to drift into the shop, and, hearing this bottle contained the most beautiful girl in the world, they bought it up by general subscription of the fo'c'sle. When they unstoppered him at sea, and saw it was only poor Frank, their disappointment knew no bounds, and they used him with the utmost barbarity.

THE END.

" If this happens again you can find another job! I pay you to keep my car right!"

Lord Smith's Candid Diary

By Alex Barber

Illustrations by Tony Weare

LORD SMITH, hurrying back to the garage through the last windy tatters of the storm, forgot the stranger who had sheltered in the same shop doorway.

A mechanic's overalled legs sprawled out from under the long car. Foster humbly told Lord Smith that it was nearly ready. Lord Smith entered the back of the car, allowed Foster to arrange his rug, and waited, stroking his sandy waterfall moustache and thinking of a man he knew who was happily married. Well, you could get used to anything, he reflected, and it was too late in the day to expect May to change.

Gradually his revolving thoughts churned up a familiar state of resentment. It crossed his mind, not for the first time by a long way, what he might have been if he had married a different sort of woman. The knowledge that he could never have tolerated marriage with any woman but May did not lessen his regret—it somehow intensified it, and in an undefined way he managed to blame her, not only for being what she was, but for being the only possible woman for him. He chopped off the end of a cigar angrily with a silver cutter. What a foul day! And, of course, the car had to go wrong on a day like this, in a hole like this!

He beckoned to Foster, and blew smoke in the man's thin face when he presented himself at the door.

" What 's that damfool mechanic doing ? " he demanded, his voice squeaking as it wavered up out of control. " Does he ——— well think we can stay here all night ? If this happens again you can find another job ! I pay you to keep my car right ! "

" I 'm very sorry, my Lord," said the chauffeur, turning white.

" Yes, and you 'll be sorrier when you 've lost your job ! Give that mechanic hell and make him get a move on ! "

" Yes, my Lord. I will, my Lord," and the chauffeur's frightened face disappeared as he bent down to whisper to the man under the car.

The sight of his wife, when he got home, gave Lord Smith no pleasure. She looked like a cook, he reflected with disgust. He had forgotten that her cooking, in the first year of their married life, had rescued his digestion from the effects of slapdash landladies who had been asking impossibilities of it for years.

Lady Smith was a plump, puddingy sort of woman, with a round face and rather unexpectedly pretty blue eyes. Nowadays she covered her face liberally with powder advertised as the final touch of charm for the soignée woman, but the powder was unable either to give her charm or to make her look soignée or to hide her incurable good nature.

She met Lord Smith in the hall, reaching him in advance of the butler, and pulled his coat off with her own hands. He wished irritably that she would leave servants' jobs to the servants. He felt a fool, with Marks standing there looking on. The trouble with May was she never seemed to remember they were gentry now, not back in the little plumbing business of twenty years ago.

" You haven't got wet, have you ? " she demanded, patting him exploratorily with ringed hands.

" Don't fuss," said Lord Smith shortly.

" I thought you 'd be in an hour ago. I wondered where on earth you 'd got to, Alfie."

" Car broke down," said Lord Smith. " All right, Marks." And when the butler had disappeared smoothly, like part of a machine : " And don't call me Alfie ! "

" I shall call you Alfie if I want to," said Lady Smith, with a show of spirit, but still maintaining that hovering air which women have towards men for whom they feel maternally responsible, especially after showers of rain.

" I 've told you before," said Lord Smith, forcing out the words like reluctant corks, not because he lacked the desire for self-expression but because he desired so strongly to say more, far more, than was possible if life was to go on being liveable in the home, " I won't be made a fool of before the servants ! "

" No one," said Lady Smith placidly, with a flair which she occasionally revealed for hitting nails squarely on the head without premeditation, " no one can make a fool of you if you aren't one, and if you are one nobody but yourself can stop it."

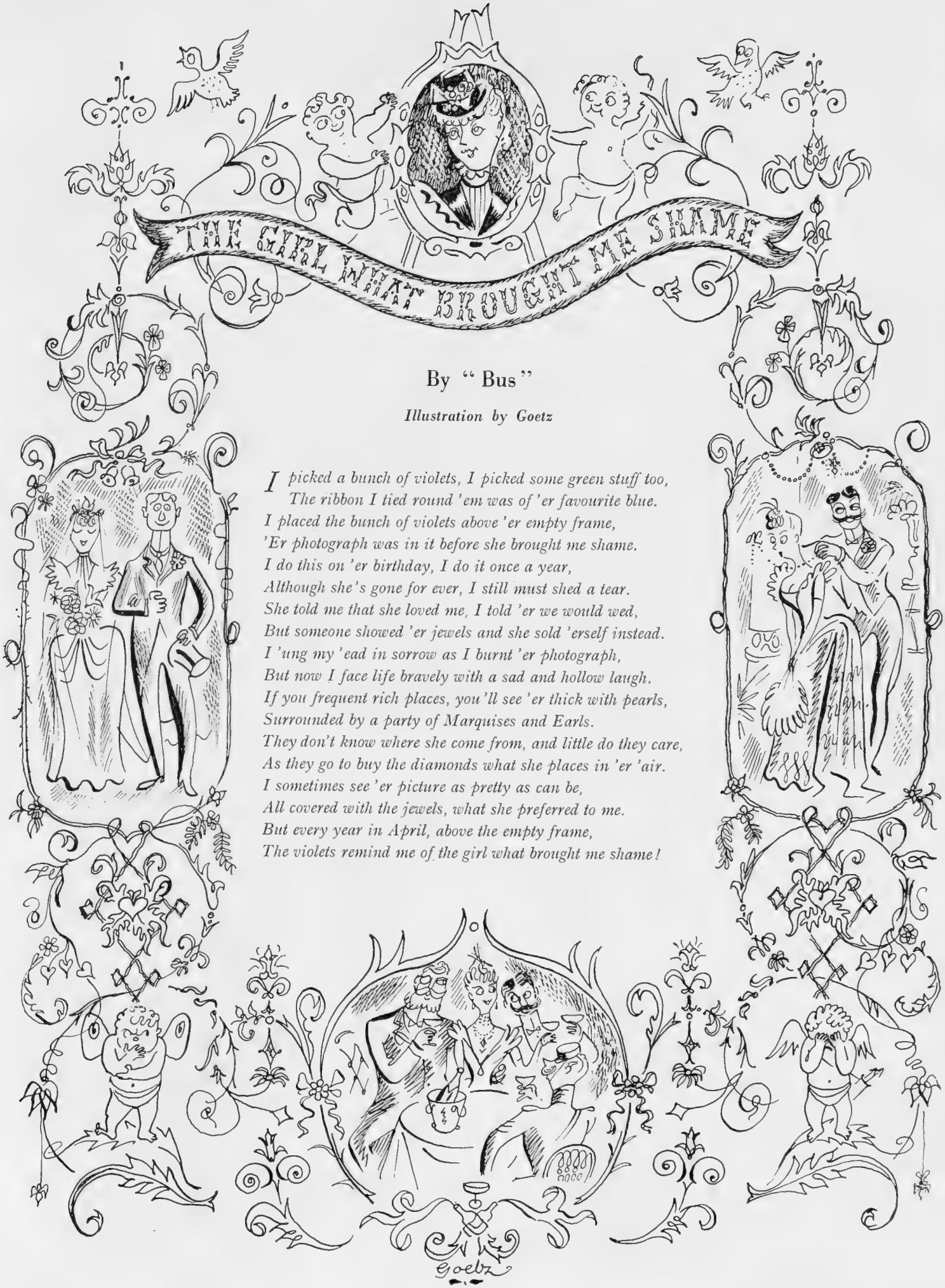
Lord Smith grunted, and they turned to walk with silent constraint in to dinner.

It was after dinner, as they sat with books—armed with them against one another rather than equipped for reading—before the drawing-room fire, that the stranger's words floated back into Lord Smith's mind.

" Keep a diary," the chap in the shop doorway during the storm had said—" an honest diary," and it had—what was it he had said ?—it had released him from—what is it ?—from frustration — that was it — from frustration. Completely released him.

Lord Smith pushed the soles of his slippers two inches nearer the blaze, and sank proportionately flatter in his deep chair.

(Continued on page 30-32)



The Girl What Brought Me Shame

By "Bus"

Illustration by Goetz

I picked a bunch of violets, I picked some green stuff too,
The ribbon I tied round 'em was of 'er favourite blue.
I placed the bunch of violets above 'er empty frame,
'Er photograph was in it before she brought me shame.
I do this on 'er birthday, I do it once a year,
Although she's gone for ever, I still must shed a tear.
She told me that she loved me, I told 'er we would wed,
But someone showed 'er jewels and she sold 'erself instead.
I 'ung my 'ead in sorrow as I burnt 'er photograph,
But now I face life bravely with a sad and hollow laugh.
If you frequent rich places, you'll see 'er thick with pearls,
Surrounded by a party of Marquises and Earls.
They don't know where she come from, and little do they care,
As they go to buy the diamonds what she places in 'er 'air.
I sometimes see 'er picture as pretty as can be,
All covered with the jewels, what she preferred to me.
But every year in April, above the empty frame,
The violets remind me of the girl what brought me shame!

Putting down what he really thought about May, and the way she went on—not a bad idea. Get rid of some of this bottled-up feeling. Have to take care she didn't get hold of the diary, though. Phew! There 'd be a rumpus if that happened! But, of course, it wouldn't happen. No trouble to keep it locked up safely. Yes, there was definitely something in it. Funny, running into that chap in the shop doorway like that. A bit of luck, it might be—if this diary really worked. And why shouldn't it? The psychology of it was sound. Let off all this repression; letting off steam, as you might say. Why, that was what he had been needing all along—to let off steam.

His enthusiasm quickened. His mind became more alert, and the first thin edge of joy slid in—the tentative delight of a man seeing a new freedom, dimly, but with a subconscious realisation that it was a true vision—a possibility, even a probability. He sucked at his sandy moustache with almost an impatience to begin.

Lady Smith looked across at him, placid but sorrowful. She had wanted her marriage to be different. She had had a picture in her mind of a tranquil middle-age together; she had had many dreams. But, being a woman, she was able to put her dreams up on a shelf; take them down occasionally, dust them with sentimental regret, and put them back, without letting them interfere with the practical necessity of making the best of the existing bad job. She refused to give up hope of getting Alfie to see things in the right light—unaware that that was precisely his wish about her—but she was prepared to find a sort of happiness in things as they were, rather than miss it altogether. Just now a mood of tenderness had come upon her, and she felt suddenly that she would give anything for a word of real love from him. She laid down her book on her lap.

"Alfie, it 's nice being by the fire, isn t it?"

It wasn't what she had meant to say at all—she didn't know what she had meant to say, but not that. Her heart was beating fast.

"Ur," grunted Lord Smith, drawing his eyebrows together and continuing to stare at the fierce glow on the logs, through the veil of flames.

"I wish——" said Lady Smith, and stopped and sighed.

"What?" said Lord Smith, without interest, even with a sort of insolence.

Lady Smith shook her head.

"Nothing," she said, and in that word, in the way she said it, something else came into the room. Each was suddenly aware of a deep woe stirring in the heart, an ache for things that could have been. Reality had sounded in the word, by no design, like a note of God among common sounds.

Lord Smith thought, "Hell! What a muck we 've made of things!"

Lady Smith was thinking of their wedding-day.

The next evening Lord Smith started his diary, shutting himself up in his study for the purpose. Thereafter, for ten days, he kept it up. Sometimes he only spent a snatched quarter of an hour on it before going to bed. Once or twice he gave up most of the evening to it, and was surprised at his own fluency. He nearly missed it twice, but brought a dogged, won't-be-beaten effort of will to bear on the temptation to backslide, and defeated it.

At the end of ten days, sitting at the table in his study, he had an impulse to read through what he had written. He began at the beginning and went straight through. It pleased him. He noticed, with satisfaction, the way in which the traits of people around him were faithfully jotted down. "May fussed around me this evening, as usual, because I was late," he read. And the comment following it, "She might as well have been born a hen." Not bad, that! Not half bad! He stared at it with his bulging eyes, and softly chuckled. Might as well have been born a hen! That was good!

Then about the chauffeur, Foster. "Had to tick Foster off for being late to pick me up at the club. Threatened to sack him, and saw him go as white as a sheet. The chap 's a funk." Well, that was true. Foster *was* a funk. Never stood up to you, never had any excuse ready: just stood and shivered in his shoes and took it all. Yes, that summed him up pretty accurately—a funk, a coward.

Lord Smith leaned back and re-read the parts that he liked best. Then he laid the pages down and fumbled in the silver box for a cigar. When he had tossed away the match, he put back his head and stared through the smoke at the electric light bulb, feeling complete contentment.

Gosh! That chap had been right, that fellow in the shop doorway. Writing things down—especially things that had irritated you—just took the sting out of them; took it right out. He exhaled luxuriously. What it amounted to was getting a new slant on people—no, not that exactly, but getting your slant on them clear in your own mind. Yes, that was it. Take Foster, now. He 'd known Foster four years nearly, and never realised, not really realised, that the man was a born coward. Somehow, realising it made a difference. Fancy having a chauffeur who was a coward! Yet he wasn't a coward driving. That time when that fool lorry-driver—tight, it turned out afterwards—had swerved across the road straight at the nose of the car, Foster had been like ice—must have been, because he did the right thing, to a fraction of an inch. Close call, that had been. Might have cost them all their lives. And Foster had pulled them out by keeping his head. Now that was a funny thing. Courage in his job, but no courage about losing it. Of course, he was married. Lord Smith supposed that was it—the chap was thinking of his wife and family—the second baby was due soon, wasn't it?

Faint uneasiness crept into Lord Smith's contentment. Abruptly he switched to the thought of May. He 'd hit her off, hadn't he?—just the right description for her, an old hen. That was what she was. And fussing around him.

The thought of Foster, and the dim background of Foster's wife and family, edged back, disturbing his train of thought about May almost before it was started. He supposed, really, he owed his life to Foster. Owed his life to him. The idea swelled from the barest flicker of disquieting interest to vivid significance. He sat quite still and stiff, facing it. He felt uncomfortable. He had not imagined that he owed his life to anybody, in any sense. And to Foster! His mind shied away from the truth, yet could not escape from it: he would be dead now, most likely, if it hadn't been for Foster.

A certain wildness invaded his mind now. His thoughts swung to May. An old hen. Well, that was what she was—he found himself, not applauding the description now, but defending it, as though some part of his mind had challenged it. She fussed; she was always fussing; he was sick of it.

Into his uneasy mind there floated the picture of his bedroom, and a grave-faced doctor swinging a stethoscope annoyingly. The doctor's eyes were fixed on him, and they were serious, too serious.

He had nearly been a goner that time. And May had been—well, she had been wonderful. Sat up day and night; did everything for him.

(Concluded on page 78)

She bent and took hold of his shoulders. "Why, Alfie! Alfie! You 're crying!"

"400 sheep, my Lord, 401, 402, 403, 404 . . . ."

What Shall We Play?

By Nicolas Bentley
(who also drew the pictures)

APART from the wet-blanketing effect of unwanted relatives, the trouble about Christmas is usually the lack of anything to play except the old games. And as we approach middle-age, these somehow seem to lose the attraction they had for us between the ages of five and ten. "Sir Roger" is no longer quite the romp it used to be, and Blind Man's Buff and Postman's Knock seem to have become stale with repetition. So let us, for a change, try some variations on these old themes, such as—

MUSICAL BUFF

in which the players, who are blindfolded, and no doubt pretty dumb as well, seat themselves as if to play musical chairs. At the firing of a starting-gun, or some other signal, they rise majestically from their seats and are twiddled round by the other guests with pianoforte accompaniment.

When, because of vertigo or claret cup, the players begin reeling in their tracks, they should start to move slowly round the chairs, preferably all in the same direction, although a good deal of amusement can be added to the game by facing one or two people the wrong way round.

Touch Wood

After they have all felt their way about the chairs for some time, and the pianist has been skilfully removed from the instrument, the players will be told to sit down; each one must then do so in the chair that he, she or it previously occupied. How are they to recognise their own chairs? Ask me another.

The feeling, fumbling and sniffing which then goes on will often prove the most diverting part of the game, particularly to those who have had the sense to stand out in favour of other people who thought they wanted to play. It is especially amusing, if for instance, one of the party has a wooden leg. "Ah!" some player will say, feeling the leg carefully, "this must be the little *Louis Quinze* that I sat on."

He will then sit down on the man with a wooden leg who, being already rather ill-balanced, goes down like a log, which, of course, is partly true.

Another player, perhaps, prodding the ample trunk of some lady, will cry: "I know this—it 's my old saddle-bag!"

Whereupon the lady begins striking out all round, and the whole thing develops into a very ugly brawl in which everybody is eventually the loser.

Sawing Through a Woman—or Women

FRENCH AND ENGLISH AND NICARAGUANS

For this the party must split up into three equal groups, that is to say, three groups equal in number; although if there are several sets of twins among the guests, their equality of appearance will be laughably unusual.

It does not really matter whether a pair of twins is divided between two of the groups, unless the twins be of the Siamese kind. In this case, the advice of a medical man should be sought before they are split up, or split down, or sawn through, according to the manner of their juncture.

Each group must then decide upon the nationality it proposes to adopt. If, for instance, one group should eventually decide to become Brazilian or Portuguese, it will be as well to point out to it the pitfalls of exchanging one's nationality, as well as the unequalled advantages of possessing a British passport.

When and if all the groups have decided what they want to be, the game begins. It is up to the players to decide the best way of beginning it, but whatever happens the Nicaraguans must NEVER be allowed to win.

SLIP THE HUNTER

which is an outdoor game, may be played by any number of people up to about seventy or eighty. The players must gather at some place where a meet is to be held, and should mingle with the crowd as if innocent of any purpose but to

No Marks

gape with the bystanders, tattlers and absolute sketches who invariably turn up to stare at hunting-folk.

While the riders are chaffing, laughing and quaffing, if lucky, the players should glide surreptitiously from horse to horse, loosening each saddle girth by skilful legerdermain. So that when the field begins to move off it will do so in two directions at once.

The player who scores the highest number of actual tip-offs, no points being allowed for belly-clinging, is the winner, and is entitled to the lees of the stirrup-cup. If, as is likely, this has already been smeared by the moustachios of all the ladies and gentlemen who, with a nice sense of propriety, are following rather than preceding the hounds, the winner will be well advised to pour the lees of the cup upon the head of the nearest urchin.

POSTMAN'S SOCK

One member of the party, who must afterwards be sent out of the room, is chosen as the Postman.

The others then begin to play pinochle, craps, or whatever game they may choose, until the Postman, tired of waiting, knocks on the door and asks if the game is about to begin. Those inside, who by this time are enjoying their pinochle, or whatever it may be that they are playing, will answer: "No! We are not ready yet!"

"Aren't you ready?"

They will then go on with their game.

Presently the Postman will bang on the door again, and the players will answer as before: "No! WE ARE NOT READY YET!"

And again they will then carry on with their game.

This is likely to happen a good many times, until the Postman's patience is finally exhausted. He will then come bursting into the room and ask what the hell 's been going on. If so, the players should simultaneously give him a Bronx cheer, and dive underneath the table. But by this time no doubt he will be simply livid, and will begin to land out at everyone.

The winner is the last person whom the Postman succeeds in giving a sock on the puss.

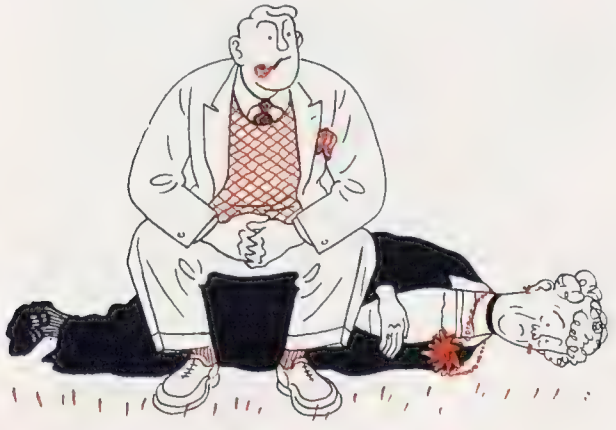
ROLLING GRANNY HOME

Rolling Granny Home is another game to be played out of doors.

Take an old lady out into the garden and place her on her side. Then let another of the players go off into the shrubbery or some other place which will count as "Home," and there conceal himself, thank God.

When he is well and truly hidden, he should whistle, and if, by this time, anyone has any further interest in the game and happens to be listening, the old lady should at once be rolled off in the direction of the sound. This will often prove to be more difficult than it may seem, for points will be deducted from the possible total of 1775 (American War of Independence), if the old girl is allowed to touch the flowerbeds, rose-trees, etc. She must also be prevented from going off full-tilt down any banks or braes or into any ornamental water, no matter how great the temptation.

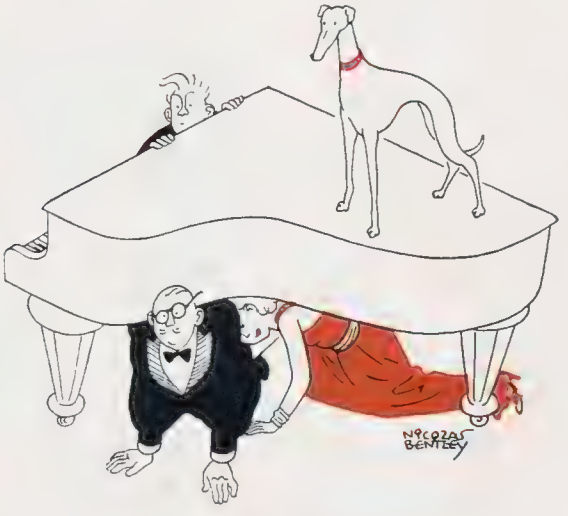
During this time, the player hidden in the shrubbery should continue to whistle, but if his or her repertoire becomes exhausted, the other players may shout suggestions, such as: "I 'm coming, Virginia," "El Relicario," or Edwin Lemare's "Moonlight and Roses." If, on the other hand, the whistler chucks it and creeps back into the house by some other path, it will be jolly unfair.



Wait till the Whistle Blows

SIXES AND SEVENS

For this game thirteen players are necessary, but if not more than twelve people are available, then it may be played by twelve people and a dog. Or if there is only one person, and he or she has twelve dogs, he or she and the dogs may play the game. They need not play, of course, if they do not want to; or they can await the arrival of one dog or twelve other people.



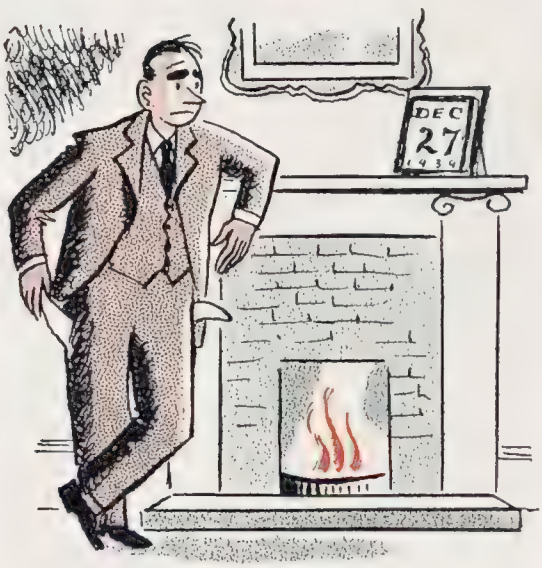
"Who Won?"

If, when these have arrived, the room is found to be too small to accommodate more than eleven people and the dog, which will probably refuse, quite rightly, to be left alone with cook for the evening, then the door may be opened and the dog or one of the players put into the passage outside. Or two of the players may be put outside and the dog left in the room with the rest of the party.

Alternatively, the piano may be shifted out into the passage, though in moving it about, access to the room must be left for the players who have helped to take it outside; otherwise those in the passage are likely to find themselves separated by the piano from the main body of players inside the room. And if at that moment cook happens to be going up to bed and the dog should see her, he will probably leap over or under the players standing in the intervening space, between his own position and that of cook, and quite rightly bite her in the ankle. Care should be taken in the confusion which is likely to follow to see that none of the players' ankles are bitten instead of those belonging to cook. Otherwise some of the players may be left lying behind the piano in the passage, unable to move hand or ankle. This would be a pity, as it means that cook would go scot free and thus be the winner.

THE END

Christmas and After : By Anton



"Your husband, modom. They've packed him with the rocking-horse—by mistake"

By Maurice Lane-Norcott

Illustrations by Hewitt

WELL, here we are at Lady Cleethorpe's jolly Christmas party. Here we certainly are. And very nice we look, too, I dare say. *Très distingué et bien soigné.* Although our vest *is* inside out.

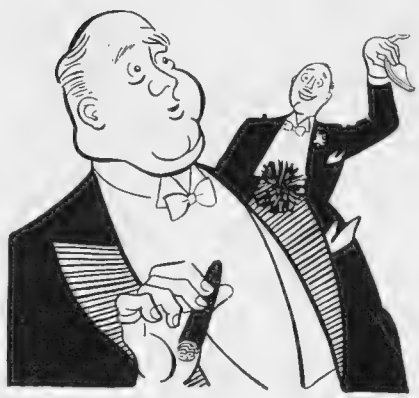
And serves you right, too, fellow. Rushing like that at the last minute. So mad to get to the party. And do you wear wool next to your skin, Mr. Lane-Norcott, or silk? Neither, inquisitive. I wear buttons. Oh, you faddist!

Ah, how-d'you-do, Miss Forest? Yes, delightful Christmas weather we are having, aren't we? Particularly for the time of year.

Now let me think. *Have* I read any good books lately? Well, I have read my pass-book. And I didn't care for it at all, Miss Forest. Oh, dear, no. I thought the central character was very much overdrawn and the whole narrative extremely unbalanced. Yes. Yes. Er—yes. Must you really go and find your mother now? Well, we will meet again presently, I hope. . . .

So you hope *that*, do you? Down in the Forest nothing stirred. Not a sound was heard, not a funeral note. *And* no wonder. You 've made a most ghastly *faux pas*, fellow. I 've just remembered something. Her name isn't Forest. It 's Wood.

"Ah, how-d'you-do, Miss Forest?"



Let 's wave at it in a friendly way

What faces! What mince-pie-gorged, turkey-satiated faces! See that large rubicund one over there? That 's our host's. Let 's wave at it in a friendly way with this caviare sandwich. That 's the least we can do. Hullo, Sir George! Happy Christmas. . . . He has a face like a benediction. Don't you mean a benedictine? No, I don't, you cad!

And there in the distance surely is our generous hostess, Lady Cleethorpe herself, peering wanly from behind that bust by Epstein. . . .

Well, maybe you 're right. Perhaps it isn't by Epstein. Indeed, I can see now that it lives and breathes. . . .

Still, I must really insist that it 's a bust. Note with what majesty it surges into the throng, carrying all before it. Soon, I fear, it will be upon us. Beware the mighty avalanche, beware the. . . . Oh, excelsior, excelsior! Ha! Ha! Ha! Excelsior *where*? Why, to the buffet, of course. . . .

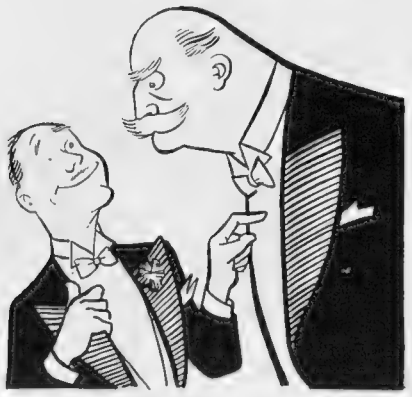
Dear, dear, dear, dear, dear, *dear!* Now you 've done it, my poor fellow. You 've got us entangled with the military now. There 's Colonel What 's-his-name. A *pukka-sahib*, if ever there was one. Or is it *punka*? I never can remember this *mammy-palaver*. . . . Well, *listen* to him, fellow, or he 'll shoot you down like a tiger. . . .

Ah, how-d'you-do, Colonel? Yes, it certainly is hot in this *schemozzle*, as you soldiers say out in India. You *don't* say that? Well, well. Never mind. I dare say you *think* it. What they need in this *tiffin* are a few *pukka-wallahs*, eh? Why, of *course*! *Punka*-wallahs! How stupid of me. No, I 've never been to India, Colonel. Still, I should dearly like to go. I should like to go at this very minute. Oh, to be sitting out on the *sarang*, Colonel, sipping *bhang* and listening to the natives crooning in the *kraal*! As Kipling says——oh, must you really join the ladies?

Ah, Lady Cleethorpe, Lady Cleethorpe! You poor wan woman! You little realise as you flit from body to body what a cramp Mr. Lane-Norcott is putting in your jolly Christmas party. Already Miss Wood has reported him to her mother. And now, in a moment of *ennui*, he has routed Colonel What 's-his-name.

All the Sheiks in India couldn't do that, Lady Cleethorpe. Oh, dear, no. Shall I tell you what the Sheiks in India did

Beware the mighty avalanche



"A few pukka-wallahs, *eh?"*

at the approach of the Colonel, whom, I suspect, they called "*Bung-sahib*," meaning "You purple-faced bore-wallah"? They ran for their very lives, Lady Cleethorpe. They fled in what the military call "Disorder." Never again did they raid the station. Don't ask me *what* station, because if you do I shall certainly say "Poona Central."

Should auld acquaintance be forgot and never brought to mind, should . . .

Why, yes, I think they should, really.

No, I 'm sorry, Featherstonhaugh, but I don't remember you at all. No, I 've

"Ah, Lady Cleethorpe, Lady Cleethorpe!"

absolutely no recollection of playing bridge with you. I beg your pardon? We 're members of the same club and often meet in the card-room? Do we? Well, well. No matter. I always forget old acquaintances.

Why, certainly, fellow. By all means let 's tak' a cup o' kindness yet for the sak' o' auld lang syne. Let 's tak' a cup of that pink kindness from the side table, be it what it may. Who knows?—it *may* be claret. . . . Well, I know, for one. It *isn't* claret. Oh, very well. We won't tak' it then. We 'll tak' a whisky-and-soda instead. . . .

I called for louder music and for stronger wine.

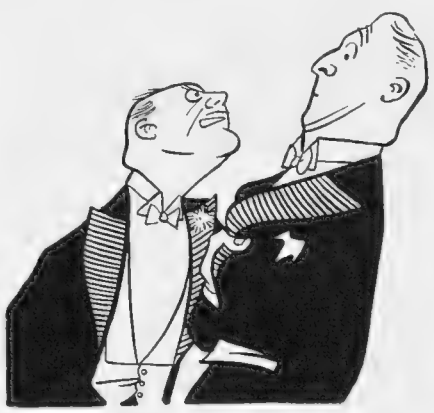
That 's a quotation from Dowson, Miss Pearlwhistle. . . . You, girl, with the receding forehead and the strapless frock, eating pêche Melba at the end of the room, I mean. A fat lot you care about Dowson, Miss Pearlwhistle! You think I mean Tommy ("Popples") Dowson, the Bentley boy, don't you? You 're in love with Tommy ("Popples") Dowson, you trollop! Come, come! Don't attempt to deny it! All girls with receding foreheads and strapless frocks think Tommy ("Popples") Dowson just too, too divine. I know *your* type. You 'd like to call for stronger tappets and for stouter tyres, wouldn't you? That line would thrill you to the marrow. Always supposing that you *have* a marrow. To me, girl, from this safe distance, you look to be entirely marrowless. . . .

Ten o'clock . . . only ten o'clock and I am aweary, aweary. I would that I were in bed. That 's practically Tennyson, fellow. The poet, not the cricketer. Oh, is it? Well, you can't be in bed here. You 've got to put your fingers in the burning rum and pull out a flaming raisin yet. You 've got to hunt Miss Pearlwhistle's great slipper yet. You 've got to kiss Lady Cleethorpe under the mistletoe and do a thousand other amusing things yet. Wishing to be in bed like that in the middle of the party! Where are your manners? Where is your British pluck and endurance? Oh, I don't know—I don't know. Where are my pyjamas and my——

Why, of *course*, Mrs. Carpenter! I should be delighted to dance with your daughter. Yes, I 'm sure she dances beautifully.

No, Miss Carpenter. That wasn't a new step. That was just a little slip. *Un petit malheur*, as the French wittily say. . . .

Now let me think. *Have* I done anything thrilling lately? Well, I have met *you*, Miss Carpenter. Until then life was a desert. It was a void. And then, straight out of the blue, you came, girl. One of these days when we know each other better you must tell me what you were doing in that old blue. I shrewdly suspect that you were up to some mischief or other in it. Bicycling, I dare say.



"I always forget old acquaintances"

From this safe distance

Cutting in and out and ringing your bell loudly at the Territorials. Without even a reflex light or——

Why, Miss Carpenter! How very odd! The music 's stopped! Here we are, still dancing like fools, and very likely the band went to supper hours ago! Ha! Ha! Ha! Probably they are all in

"Here we are, still dancing"

bed and asleep by this time. For all the data we have to go on, they—— Oh, must you really go and find your mother?

Fellow, do you never pause to think that Life is fleeting, Life is earnest, Life is but an empty dream? In the midst of this hectic gaiety do your thoughts never turn to better things?

Yes, they do. They turn to beds. They turn to armchairs, and divans, and horsehair sofas. They turn to straw, and marble slabs, and——

Why, my *dear* Lady Cleethorpe! I shall be enchanted to think of a charade for you! I pride myself that charades are my *fort*. Now let us act a charade, shall we, on the word "sleep"? All we require, dear lady, is a bed. . . .

THE END.

Susan and Father Christmas

By Mollie Panter-Downes

Decorations by Leo Dowd

UP to the time that Susan was five years old, the day nursery was pink and blue, the night nursery was blue and pink—a scheme in which a pair of Nannie's large, sagging shoes were apt to sound a regrettably earthy note. It was impossible to keep all the furniture in a Lilliputian scale, but the Gargantuan outlines of Nannie's bed had been softened with pixies. Climbing into it at night, she laid her spectacles and floating false teeth on a whimsical little table shaped like a toadstool. Pretty, Nannie considered it, and she mourned when Mrs. Ramsay read in a book that a child should not be confused by untruthful fairy tales, and away went the untruthful pixies; the frieze of bogus rabbits gave way to a reproduction of Van Gogh's sun-flowers.

"I shall change the picture every month," said Mrs. Ramsay brightly. "Susan is big enough to acquire an interest in Art."

So Van Gogh vanished in October, and Susan scowled at a strawberry-pink Matisse. Raoul Dufy had a run in November, and on Christmas Eve Nannie climbed creakingly on a chair and stuck a sprig of holly and some tinsel behind a dizzy Dali, which looked much embarrassed.

"Don't you simply love it?" Mrs. Ramsay said, coming into the nursery and surprising Susan glancing through an untruthful and confusing copy of Hans Andersen. Mrs. Ramsay referred to the Dali, not to Nannie's holly.

"Not much," said Susan.

Mrs. Ramsay sighed. Susan was not reacting properly to Art, or to the cork dado which was meant to be pinned over with bright pictures snipped by the child herself from magazines. At the moment it was adorned by a solitary clipping, a newspaper photograph of the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret Rose arriving at Balmoral.

"Don't we look gay?" said Nannie, referring to the holly. She hung a large silver cardboard bell from the electric light and observed ambiguously, "We 're getting ever so excited about our stocking. But I tell us that we 'll have to get to sleep quickly to-night or else Father Christmas will never be able to get down our chimney."

"It 's not really Father Christmas, you know, darling," said Mrs. Ramsay to her daughter. "It's *really* only Daddy and me."

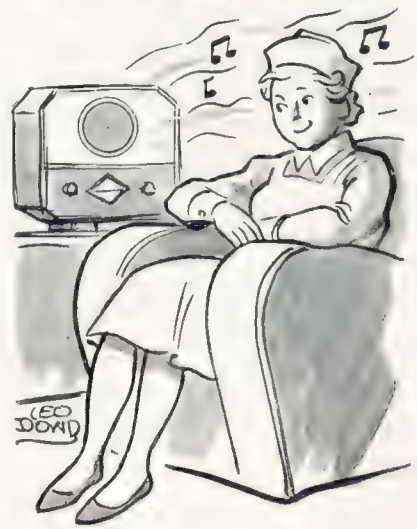
"Is it?" said Susan.

She and Nannie exchanged a smiling glance, immeasurably superior.

"There 's no such person as Father Christmas, *really*," said Mrs. Ramsay, but her voice sounded thin and unconvincing. She was not surprised, as she left the nursery, to hear Susan say anxiously, "You don't think he 'll get stuck, do you, Nannie?", and she sighed again. Susan was difficult.

Feeling depressed, Mrs. Ramsay went downstairs and carried the sherry decanter and glasses into the living-room. For a while she sat there, despondent among the perky chintzes, brooding over parenthood. Something was wrong somewhere. She took the job seriously. She went to endless pains to bend the budding mind (oh, so gently!) up all the right pergolas, to prune away the rubbishy false values and hypocrisy that she remembered as horrors of her own childhood; but the thing simply was not working out right. Was it Nannie's fault? Had the moment come to start looking round for some stark young woman, nourished on Adlerian theories? Mrs. Ramsay took a good swig of sherry and decided that the moment had probably come.

Nannie had admirable qualities, certainly, but Susan still believed a lot of whimsies about little pink babies floating down on little pink clouds to their little pink cribs, although Mrs. Ramsay had taken the first opportunity to read her a jolly book called *Where Did I Come From?* There was the question of religion, too. Mrs. Ramsay had made it quite clear from the start that no form of belief was to be forced on Susan, but she had an idea that a good deal of bootleg praying went on quietly in the nursery. For the last few days the place had echoed with shrill Noels and shepherds watching their flocks by night, and Nannie and Susan had come in rosy, clutching horrid little packages from Woolworth's that leaked silver dust and artificial holly-berries over the rugs.



(Concluded on page i)

Grandmother's Winter Sports : By Anna Zinkeisen

Clowns' Dressing-Room at the Royal

Agricultural Hall: By Henry Hoyland, R.B.A.

The Proverbs

A Problem Picture By Tom Chadwick

There are thirty-three familiar sayings illustrated in this painting. How many can you find ?

The key is on page ii.

..AND ALL OUR

YESTERDAYS....
alexjardine

Carreras Ltd. 150 years' reputation for quality

"George, I was turning things over in my mind again this afternoon"

Christmas Trees

By Betty Askwith

Illustrations by Reinganum

"THERE," said Rosalie, as she adjusted the last bit of tinsel. "I think Bill's eyes will fall out of his head with excitement when he sees that to-morrow."

"It 's very grand," I agreed, for the tree stood quite four feet in its red earthenware pot. "The biggest we 've ever had, I think."

"Well, last year——" my wife began. "Oh, of course, you weren't here last year. I don't suppose you saw a Christmas-tree at all, poor darling."

"Why, yes. Hollywood Boulevard is lined with Christmas-trees all the way up."

"But I thought it was summer weather out there ? "

"So it is. Poinsettias and roses blooming in the gardens, and you walk about in flannel trousers and a sleeveless pullover, but all the same there are those Christmas-trees, about fifteen feet high, and covered with electric-light bulbs of different colours. They 're very pretty in a way, though, of course, they 're a bit synthetic."

Synthetic, that was the word she had used when I bumped into her at a corner because I was staring at the Christmas-trees. It so startled me to hear an English voice, not like that of an English movie actor simply dripping with Oxford accent and dropping all the "g's," that I all but let her walk on. Then I woke up.

"Yes, they are synthetic," I said, "and they 're making me homesick. How about you ? "

"They seem a long way away from the kind one used to have," she answered. "You know, a very untidy room and a cotton sheet on the floor and bits of tinsel everywhere, and two or three coloured glass globes shattered into fragments—we used to keep ours from year to year. . . . "

"Why, of course, so did we. Getting gradually fewer every year. And did you have those round, shiny, silver ones in which one could see the room reflected all tiny and clear and distorted ? "

"Yes, indeed, and a wax fairy for the top."

"She went on for years. And do you remember the smell when a candle caught one of the branches ? "

"My father always had a sponge on top of a long stick in case of accidents."

I must say, it was loads of fun getting things for that tree

"So did my uncle. But it never could be found at the critical moment. Look here, let 's go and have a drink and talk some more about Christmas-trees."

My word, I was glad to find her. I was so lonely in Hollywood I didn't know what to do. I was a fool to have come. They 'd paid my passage both ways, but I didn't have a contract for doing anything when I got there, and I could see by then they weren't really going to film my book—at least, not for the next ten years. I was a fool to stay, but I kept hoping against hope, and somehow I felt I wouldn't turn up at home quite so quickly after leaving with such a fanfare of trumpets. So there I was, mooning about without a soul to speak to, ready to expire from sheer boredom. So it was grand to find her. She was a bit like Rosalie, too. The same height and colouring, fair hair and dark eyes. I talked nineteen to the dozen about Rosalie and Bill, and she didn't seem bored. I think at first she liked me. I 'm sure she did. I think that was why she picked me up. Because I was English, and probably reminded her of someone, just as she reminded me of Rosalie. I think she went about with me all that first week because she liked me. After the passport, of course, it was different.

It happened like this. I'd been talking as usual about my wife and my young son (there certainly was something about her that led one on to talk, something quiet and still, and enchantingly sympathetic), and she asked me if I had a picture of either of them.

I laughed. "Why, I 've got some big ones at the hotel I 'd love to show you," I said, "but, as a matter of fact, I 've got one on me right now. I 've put on this suit for the first time, and what do you think I 've found in the pocket ? Rosalie's passport ! It must have been there since we went to Deauville in August. I only hope to goodness she doesn't want to go abroad while I 'm here. She 'll be furious ! But otherwise, I suppose she won't miss it. She *is* a little scatter-brain."

"Oh, let me look," she cried.

"It 's a terrible photograph. No one could tell if it 's Rosalie or an old Southern Mammy. It 's not so bad of Bill, though ; only, of course, he was a year younger then."

It was after that she asked me to come and take a room in her friends' apartment.

"It 's a great big one," she said, "and Jay and Nella are out nearly all the time. She 's a continuity girl for Fox, and he's on the electrical side at M.-G.-M. There 's only Jimmy, who 's a grand kid, just about the age of your Bill. I 've had a room there for ages, and I like it so much better than a hotel. It 'd be a lot cheaper for you than the Hollywood Roosevelt, and I don't know—somehow I don't like to think of you alone in a hotel for Christmas. Do come."

I didn't have any doubts. At least, I did, but they were the usual fatuous, complacent, masculine doubts about whether the poor little thing wasn't really going to lose her head over me. And I must admit that, in spite of

Rosalie and Bill, I had a few doubts on my own score, too. I was, in fact, strongly of opinion that it would be wiser not to go. And, of course, I went.

She helped me move in and unpack, and then we went down-town to Los Angeles, and had dinner in Olvera Street, in one of the funny little Mexican restaurants.

Olvera Street is tourist-ridden, and it 's quaint, but it is very pretty, with its little booths opening on to the narrow street, with their load of gay, Mexican pottery and glass and coloured strings of dried fruits. We were turning over a basketful of those tiny jugs and plates, three for a dime, and I was saying I 'd like to buy some for Bill, when suddenly she caught my arm.

" I 've an idea," she said. " You know Jay and Nella are going out to a party Christmas Eve ? Let 's get a Christmas-tree, just a little tiny one, and decorate it for Jimmy. He would so love it. We could get some of these little things, and we could get real proper shiny things and tinsel, and if there are candles anywhere in Los Angeles, instead of coloured electric-light bulbs, we 'll have those too."

I must say, it was loads of fun getting things for that tree. We went to big stores and small stores, Japanese shops, Chinese shops, everywhere. We both bought presents for Jimmy, and I got a carved jade necklace for her, and she got something for me that she wouldn't let me look at. I hate shopping at home, and the crowds and the Christmas slogans, but out there it was different. Maybe it was because of the summer weather, the velvety sky and the huge yellow moon ; maybe it was because it was a strange city ; or maybe it 's just the person you 're with that makes things fun.

We decorated the tree on the 23rd of December, and we shut it up in my room. It was a big bed-sitting-room, with one of those beds that fold up into the wall. It even had a piano in it. Then, on the 24th, when Jay and Nella went out, we lit the candles and turned out the lights, and called Jimmy in. He was a nice kid of five and a half, with a square face and a lot of thick, yellow hair. He was much more silent and unemotional than Bill. He was tougher, and he kept himself to himself, but he liked that tree.

" Gee, it 's pretty ! " he said, when he saw it, and he reached out a hand to each of us. And it did look lovely, shining and candle-lit against the dark, shadowy curtains, with the wax fairy we 'd been at so much trouble to get poised stiffly on the topmost bough. It was a funny thing, I 'd felt hot and fretty the last two days, and I 'd figured out it was because I was wanting to kiss her, but now, standing looking at the tree, with Jimmy's hot little fingers curled in mine, linking us both, I didn't feel that way any more. I just felt frightfully happy and peaceful and serene, and as if I 'd got home.

" We ought to sing a carol," she said ; " that 's what we always did at home before we took the presents off the tree." And she went over to the piano and played, " Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht." She had a very true, clear voice, sweet as a blackbird's, and Jimmy and I both liked it. I let myself go in an orgy of sentiment : I thought of little German towns, and the snow lying crisp and shining on steep, pointed roofs ; of a star in a clear sky ; of the gaily painted cribs in the churches, surrounded by plaster oxen and donkeys ; and the humble, trusting people who kneel beside them ; all the small, dear, intimate things touched with a holy mystery that are the heart of Christmas.

" But you must sing, too," she said, when she had finished. " Let 's have something we all know." She played : " O come, all ye faithful."

Three people isn't a very good number for singing, especially when one of them is a child ; but we did all know it, and I have a tenor of sorts ; it made quite a respectable volume of sound.

" . . . joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.
. . . . . .
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ . . . "

There was a knocking at the door. I went to open it, and there stood a plain-clothes detective and a couple of cops.

" What the hell do you want ? " I said. I heard my own voice coming out astonishingly English as I said it. I don't usually speak like that to anyone, but they were so startlingly unexpected.

" It 's all right, Mister," said the plain-clothes man. " We know you 're an English couple just rented this apartment. Your wife explained everything when we called the other day, and showed us

(Concluded on page 52)

" It 's all right, Mister," said the plain-clothes man. " . . . But this apartment used to belong to Flash Joe "

Christmas Trees

(Continued from page 51)

your passports and all. But, as I expect she told you, this apartment used to belong to Flash Joe——"

"No," she broke in, "actually I didn't tell my husband; he's working on a screen play, and I try to worry him as little as possible."

"Well, it's not his trouble, ma'am. Anyway," he turned to me, "Flash Joe's a well-known diamond-thief, and from information we've received, we figure out he's probably left some of his stuff here. So with your permission we'd like to search the apartment. It's a shame to disturb you on Christmas Eve, when you've got everything fixed up so pretty, too," he cast an admiring glance at the tree, "but we only got our information to-night. So mind if we have a peek round?"

"Of course not," she said. She turned to me. "Just give me that square parcel, darling, on the left of the tree, and I'll read a story to Bill while these gentlemen are looking round."

I'd never seen a police search before, and I must admit they were pretty thorough. They went through everything, the hems of curtains, under the carpets, every tin in the larder, behind the pipes in the bathroom. I realised, too, as I went round with them, that Jay and Nella had cleared out. There wasn't a single personal possession of theirs left anywhere. Their room was under dust-sheets.

"Spare-room, hey?" said the commissioner. I nodded. And all the time she was reading aloud in a quiet, unemotional voice:

"'Have you the tinder-box?' asked the witch.

"'Plague take it!' exclaimed the soldier, 'I had clean forgotten that.' And he went and brought it.

"The witch drew him up, and he stood on the high road again, with pockets, boots, knapsack, and cap full of gold."

And Jimmy sat, curled up on her lap, quiet as a mouse, sucking his thumb. It had given me more of a turn than anything to hear her call him Bill.

At last they were through, and, mopping their foreheads, were obliged to admit defeat. I got them some canned beer, and we were just toasting each other, when Jimmy broke his long silence.

"Say," he said, "the tree's burning."

The shrill, childish voice rang out nasally in the purest Californian. It gave one the same kind of shock as when on the screen, a little silk and satin-clad Dauphin exclaims in that very accent, "Poppa, what's eatin' Momma?" or words to that effect. The policemen turned round to stare at him as if their necks were worked on a single string. I laughed.

"Just listen to that, officer," I said; "it's too bad. I try awfully hard to speak American, and you can tell my accent's phoney three States away. This kid's only been here four weeks, and God knows if we shall ever get him to speak the King's English again."

"The little monkeys'll pick up anything," agreed the officer. "But what about the tree?"

"It's all right," said "my wife." "I had your sponge all ready, dear. Just one of the candles leaned over too far."

"Well," said the officer, tilting the remains of the can down his throat. "Guess we'd better be going. Many thanks, Sir and ma'am. Merry Christmas to you, and remember us to King George when you're over there again."

I shut the door on them, and turned back. For the moment I was excited and thrilled as if I'd won a race. I wanted to shout and sing and throw things about. That was my first reaction. But she was listless and apathetic.

"Run along to bed," she told Jimmy; "you can unpack your other parcels in your room." He lifted up his face, first to her and then to me, and trotted off obediently. He must have been used to unusual happenings, that child. She sat down on the sofa. I began to feel rather flat, too.

"Look here," I said suddenly, "won't they make enquiries at the desk? They know there damn well we aren't an English couple who've just taken an apartment."

"Fixed," she answered laconically. Then she added: "I'm awfully sorry, but maybe you'd better not stay here too long. There's a British steamer coming day after to-morrow, going back through the Canal. You said you'd like to go back that way. I got a passage for you."

"Oh," I said. "By the by, where are the diamonds?"

She slipped one of the strings of beads wrapped round in tinsel from off the tree.

"Here," she said; "the big one's sewn inside the fairy on top."

Suddenly she heeled over and buried her face in the sofa-cushion, and began to cry and cry. I think I have never heard such bitter sobbing. Not even from Rosalie when they told her Bill's little brother hadn't lived.

"What is it?" I said. "I played up, didn't I? I guess you've got all you wanted. The diamonds are safe, you're packing me off. Or do you think they suspect something?"

She sat up and blew her nose violently.

"No," she said, "I don't think they suspect a thing. It's only—well, it must sound damn silly and sentimental, but it was them coming to-night. You see, I'd kidded myself. I was pretending that it was like that. That we really were a family—an ordinary family—with a Christmas-tree—and a little boy—that I really was your wife—I was pretending so hard that I was believing it—when they came. I know it couldn't have lasted more than one evening, but I wish I might have had just that."

Rosalie stepped back to admire her handiwork.

"Well, anyway," she said, "I bet the Christmas-trees in Hollywood weren't half as nice as mine."

"I saw one very pretty one," I answered, "but only for a short time."

THE END.

"D'you hear what I said? Put that down before you dent your father with it"

Natural History : by Hewitt

The Motter
Of the Otter
Is, " You can't have
Too much watter."

It's hard to determine
The ways of the Ermine ;
It changes its coat
And reverts to a Stoat.

The Skunk
Has growed a
Unpleasant
Odour.

The Cuckoo
Is a biped,
Lives in nests
He 's swipèd.

The Lion looks round
With great disdain.
The Lioness mentions
" He's all mane."

Catching the Squid
When he 's sleepier
Gives us
Unlimited Sepia.

Old Soldiers Never Die:

Yer can come out o' yer shelter now, Sir. The raid's over

Hey. You in the rear rank! What the 'ell do yer take me for—a dart board?

Move yer blinkin' rifle up a bit, can't yer! Yer on a button

Don't think much of yer bowlin', Mister. Too many leg balls

Old Bill Sees History Made: By Captain Bruce Bairnsfather

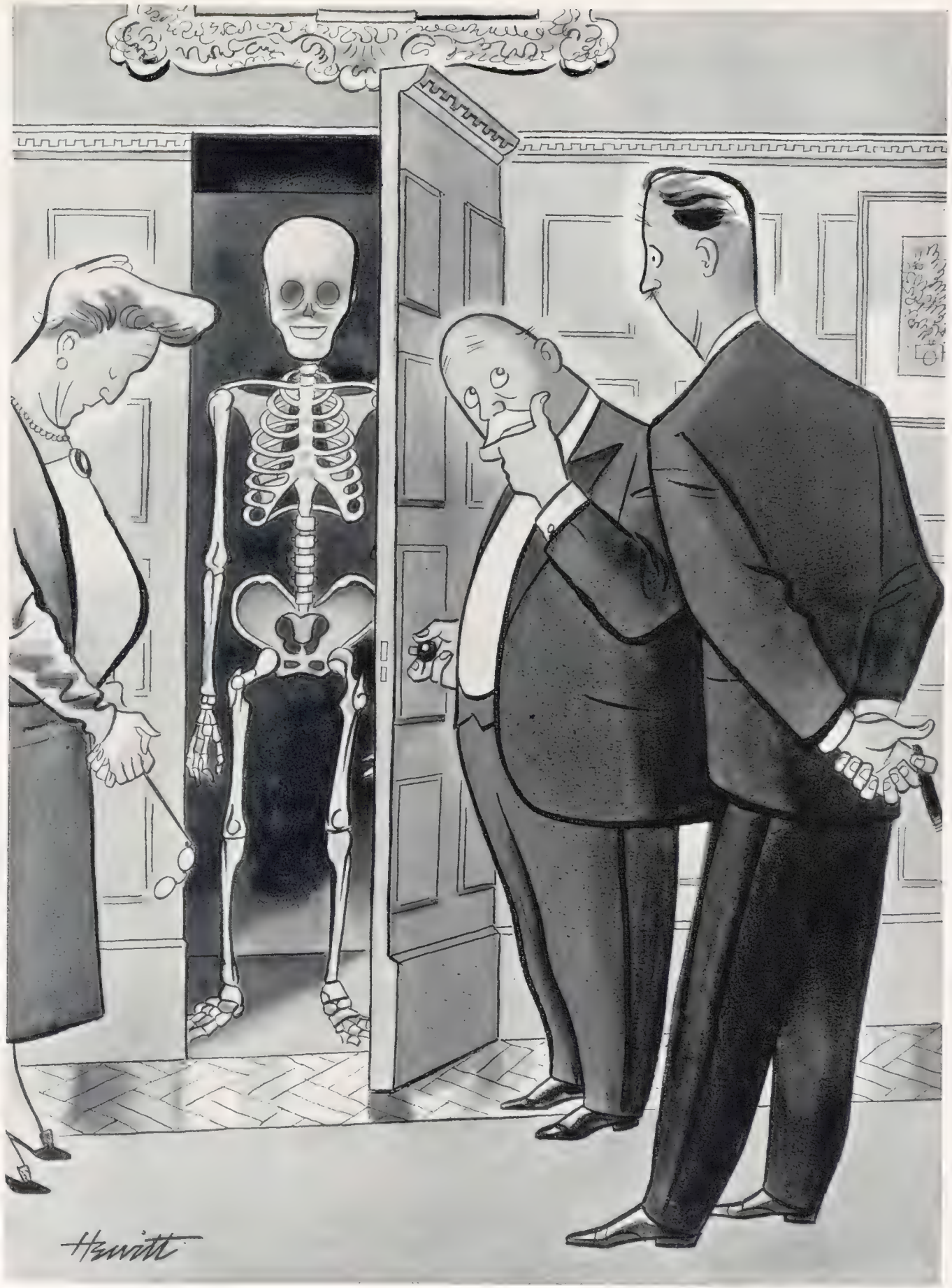
'Ere! Aint yer 'eard about the Armada comin' and seen all them posters around Plymouth about BEIN' PREPARED and all that?

I'm recruitin' for Charles, fat'ead. If yer wants' Cromwell, I'll 'ave to put yer down as a Conscientious Objector

What do yer reckon Plum and Apple jam is made of, Bert?

CENSORED

"Bloody Mary will be along a little later, Sir"

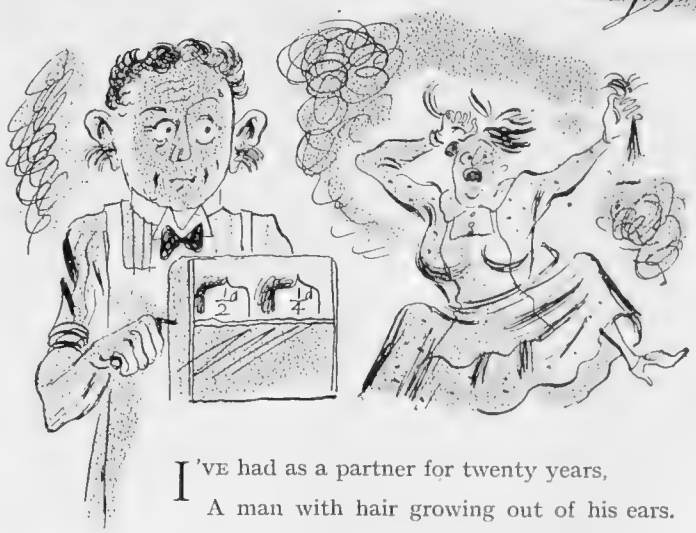


"We felt you ought to know, Captain Ogleby"

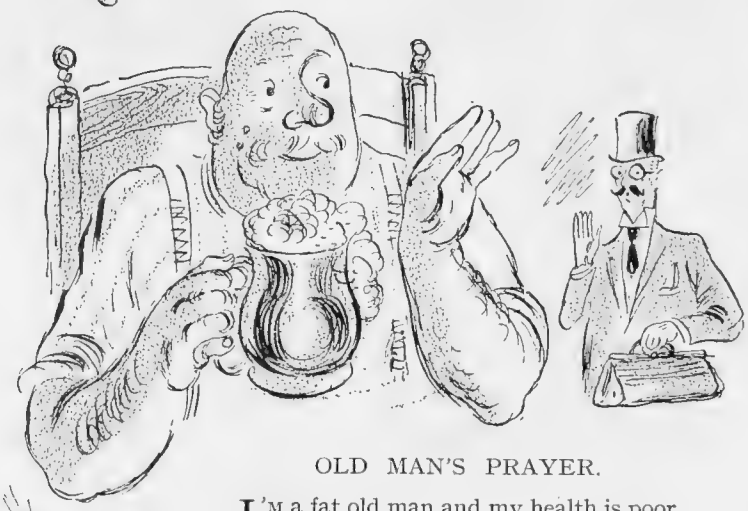
Random Verses

Drawings by

GOD gave you a lovely crown to wear,
A crown of glorious golden hair.
If you must cover it with a hat,
Why cover it with a hat like that ?



I'VE had as a partner for twenty years,
A man with hair growing out of his ears.
But it 's only when trade is very bad,
That his hairy ears drive me raving mad !



OLD MAN'S PRAYER.

I'M a fat old man and my health is poor,
My family say I am at death's door,
And I do love beer.

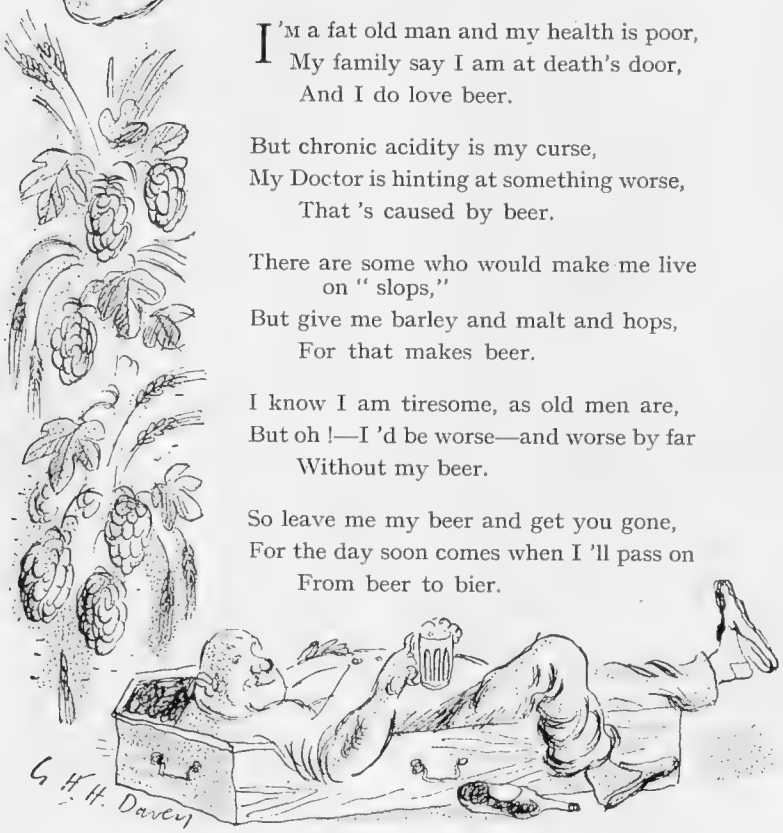
But chronic acidity is my curse,
My Doctor is hinting at something worse,
That 's caused by beer.

There are some who would make me live
on " slops,"
But give me barley and malt and hops,
For that makes beer.

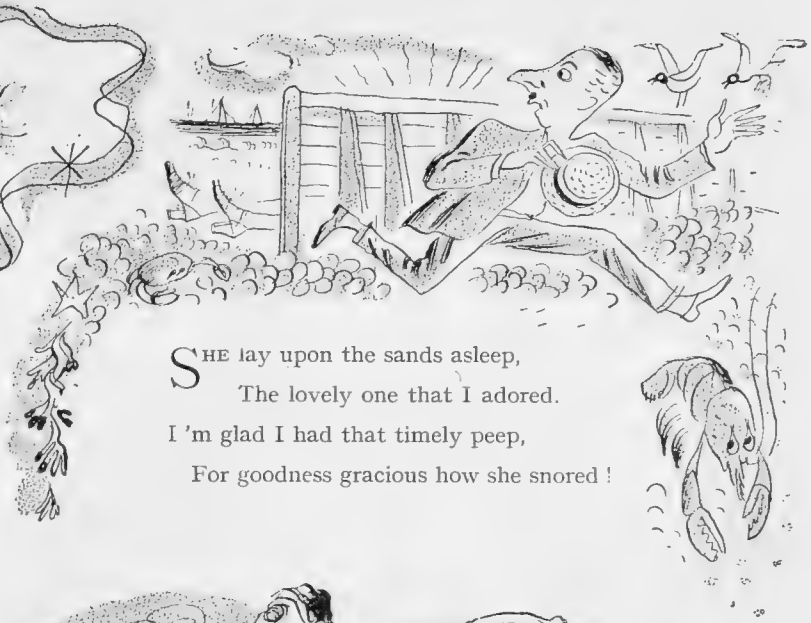
I know I am tiresome, as old men are,
But oh !—I 'd be worse—and worse by far
Without my beer.

So leave me my beer and get you gone,
For the day soon comes when I 'll pass on
From beer to bier.

THERE was a young girl of St. Ives,
Who ate onions and garlic and chives.
The men that she knew
Were seldom and few,
And they all had detestable wives.

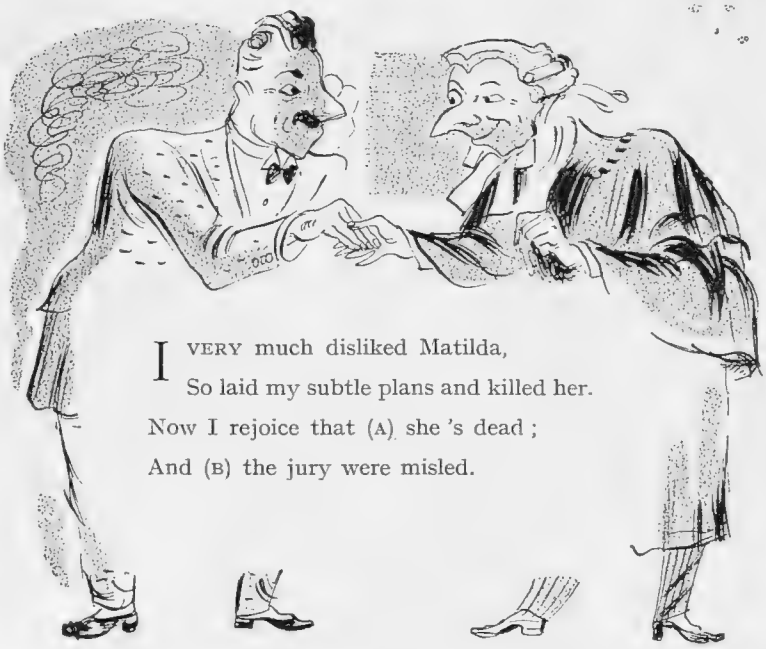


Rhymes by 'Bus' Gordon Davey

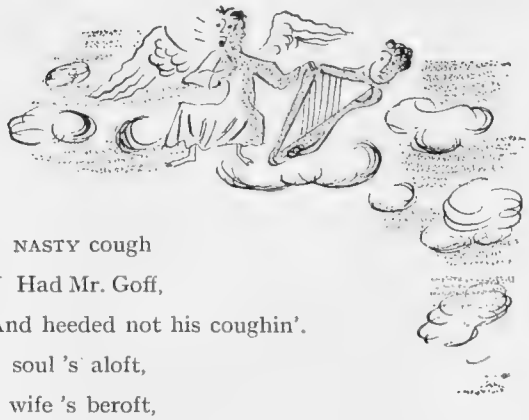


SHE lay upon the sands asleep,
The lovely one that I adored.
I 'm glad I had that timely peep,
For goodness gracious how she snored !

SAID an eager old lady of Kingston Hill,
" Whatever you do you must do with a will."
Her daughter's eyes glistened
With joy as she listened,
Recalling the things that she *had* done with Bill !

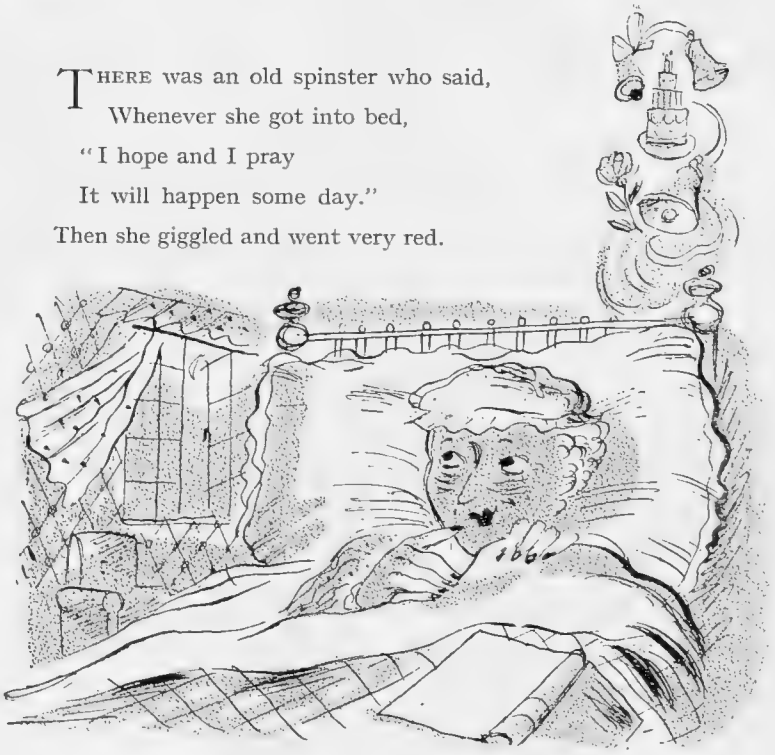


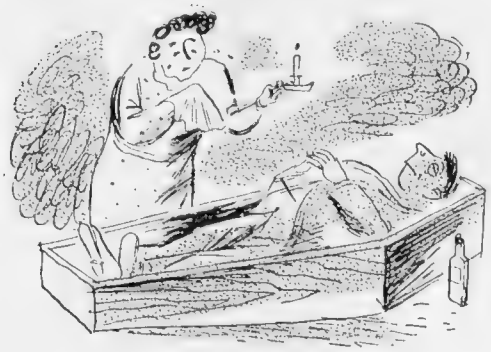
I VERY much disliked Matilda,
So laid my subtle plans and killed her.
Now I rejoice that (A) she 's dead ;
And (B) the jury were misled.



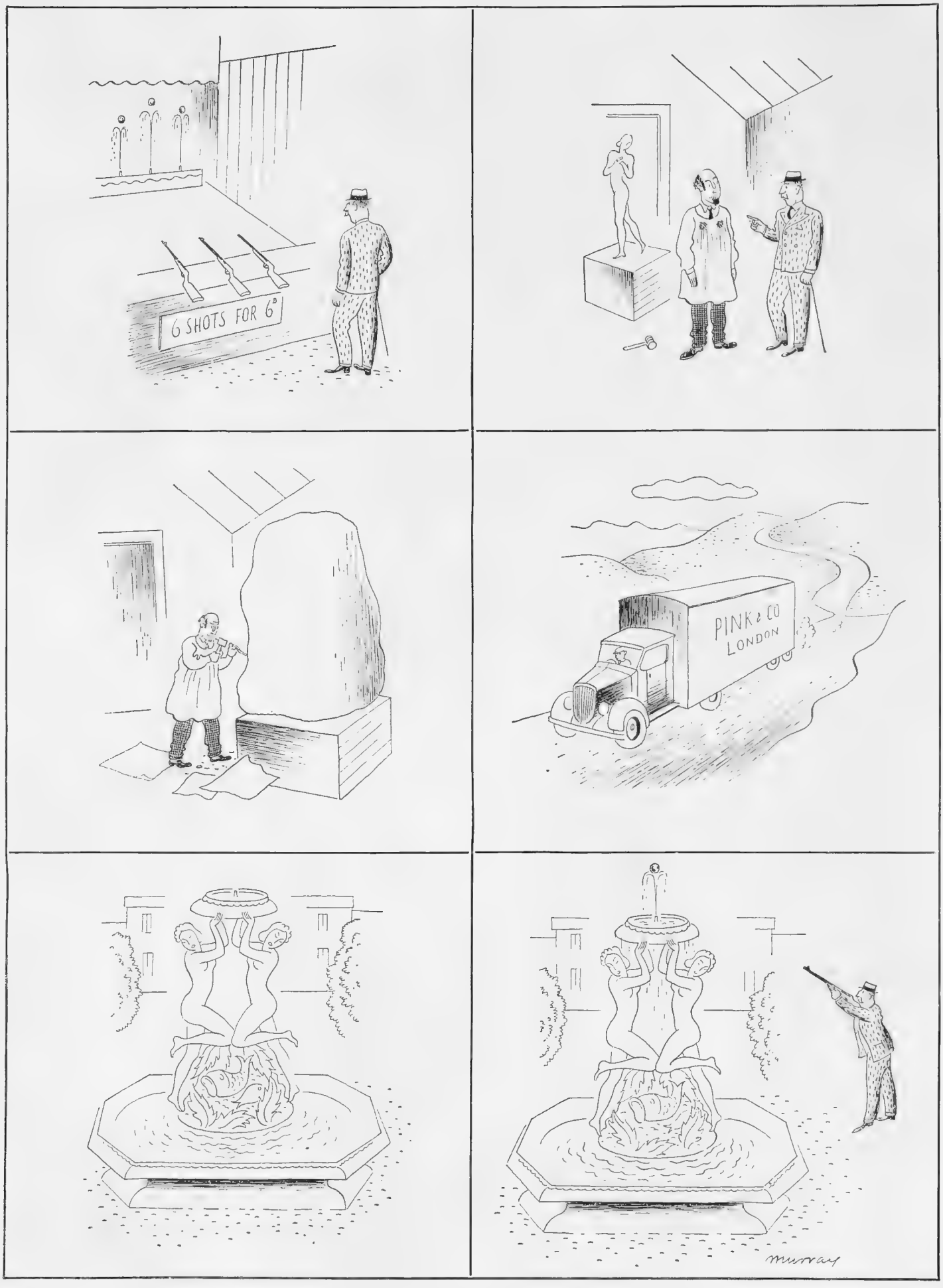
A NASTY cough
Had Mr. Goff,
And heeded not his coughin'.
His soul 's aloft,
His wife 's beroft,
And Goff is in his coffin.

THERE was an old spinster who said,
Whenever she got into bed,
"I hope and I pray
It will happen some day."
Then she giggled and went very red.





Inspiration



What the Doctor Ordered

By Walter Brooks

Illustrations by T. R. Freeman

I.

ONCE upon a time there was a young man named Watson Prior, and he didn't yearn for anything in particular. He had been sort of slowing down ever since he was six years old. From an almost hysterically excitable child he had become a normally eager and enthusiastic prep-school boy and then a rather bored honour student in college. After college, with the large quarterly income payments made him by the trustees of his father's estate, neither interest nor necessity counselled work. There was a house on Long Island, and an apartment in town, and there were cars and girls and horses and foreign plages and mixed drinks and everything on earth to entertain him. But after five years of it he had no more zest for life than a squash.

So he went to see a doctor. The doctor punched and poked and pried and peered, and then he had Mr. Prior put his shirt on and took him into the front office and told him there was nothing the matter. "Nothing, that is," he said, "except that you 've got the mind of a man of eighty in the body of a man of twenty-five." "Oh," said Mr. Prior, without much interest. "Well, what should I do?" "If you had a little romance in your system——" said the doctor. "Romance!" said Mr. Prior. "Pshaw!" "Quite so," said the doctor. "Well, you 're away behind the times. We used to get a lot of cases like yours thirty years ago. Too much security. People can't stand it. But the world to-day——" Then he glanced at his watch. "Do?" he said. "Get mad. Get scared. Get into a mess that you can't buy your way out of. Not just something dangerous. Both dangerous and dishonourable. It 's difficult to counsel you. Thirty years ago it would have been enough to palm an ace or wear a flannel shirt to a wedding. But that 's not even remarkable nowadays. And crime—well, I can't counsel crime. You 'll have to pick your own. Fifty dollars, please."

Well, Mr. Prior wasn't very enthusiastic about the advice, though he thought it good. He spent the evening at the club looking up crimes in a set of books about famous trials, but they were all either too bloody or too complicated, like Bride-in-the-Bath murders or counterfeiting. And then he remembered that his choice of a life's work at the age of eleven had been burglary. So he thought of burglary for a while, feeling that if he could revive the childhood thrill he would be on the right track. But he just went to sleep.

The next morning he had about decided to give up the idea of crime, but as he looked back on it he saw that there had been a certain amount of interest in going to the doctor, and in contrast with the day that stretched ahead of him it looked almost lurid. He was to have dined that evening with Miss Cornelia Vetch, who is best known, perhaps, for her cigarette endorsements. Miss Vetch had a sort of synthetic gaiety which showed up well in photographs, perhaps because it really was only two-dimensional, being put on with her make-up. But Mr. Prior had been brought up with her and liked her because she respected his moods—which meant that she never said anything that needed an answer. There was nothing so definite as an understanding between them, but there was a sort of vague feeling that they might some day marry. So he sent Miss Vetch a wire saying that he was called out of town, and then, without telling even the servants, he drove out to his house on Long Island.

As it was late fall, the house was closed for the season. There was no one to see Mr. Prior drive up, for the caretaker had died two years ago and he hadn't bothered to get another. He went in and pulled down the shades and built a fire and began to check in the telephone book the names of such local people as didn't know him by sight. And that evening he changed to a cap and a pair of sneakers and put a flashlight in his pocket and went out.

As a crime Mr. Prior's first burglary was hardly a success, for he was treed by a dog before he had got ten yards inside the grounds of the house he had picked out. Fortunately he remembered an imitation for which he had won some fame as a schoolboy, and he answered the dog in his own language, hoping that his owner would conclude the cause of the racket to be merely a disagreement with a neighbour over a bone. Before Mr. Prior had barked himself into a coma the dog got sick of it and trotted back to the house, and Mr. Prior was able to slip down and across the wall and so home.

Well, Mr. Prior had always taken comfort and safety for granted, but now, having been without them for an hour or so, they seemed very fine things. And so did the warm fire and the drink trickling down a throat raw with barking. He felt more alive than he 'd felt in years. Even up the tree he 'd felt alive, though pretty silly.

II.

BUT next morning the zest had vanished. Not entirely. There was still a perceptible savour in the remembered events of last evening. But present and future were as flat as cold potato soup. "Lord!" said Mr. Prior to himself. "Do I have to do it *again*?" And at the thought a thrill of terrified excitement fluttered his heart. "I guess I 'd better," he said.

That evening Mr. Prior picked out a nearby house inhabited by a Mr. Frank Hamilton. He knew nothing about

He took two cautious steps toward the window and fell with an almighty crash over a little stand with an aquarium on it

Mr. Hamilton, but it was a nice house and he supposed there 'd be something worth stealing. Anyway, it was embosomed in shrubbery, which was all to the good from a burglar's point of view. At least it seemed so until he got into the shrubs, which were mostly barberry. His clothes were shredded and even his skin was pretty well lacerated when he had finally wormed his way up to a lighted window.

It was a dining-room, and three people were finishing dinner and quarrelling. Mr. Prior judged them to be father, mother, and daughter, and the daughter was certainly getting told things, though the window was shut and he couldn't hear them. But at last she got up angrily and threw down her napkin and left the room. Mr. Prior was aware that he missed her as soon as she was gone. He wondered if he would have thought her as attractive if he had met her at a dinner or a dance instead of seeing her across the romantic chasm between burglar and victim.

But it was no time for psychological self-probings. He crawled on through a rather muddy flower-bed past the kitchen windows, where the servants were busy, and around a corner to a terrace and some unlighted French windows. One of them was ajar. He sighed and slipped in.

Voices and a little light came through the half-open dining-room door. If he were any sort of burglar Mr. Prior knew he should make for the upstairs rooms and priceless jewellery left carelessly on dressing-tables. And, of course, he did have to steal something. But this, he realised, was one of those cases where it is not so much the intrinsic value of the object as the thought behind it. He snatched up a little silver box from a table and moved cautiously nearer to the dining-room door.

Evidently the girl had come back, for he heard her say, " Mother, I 'm simply not going to argue any more. I 'm simply not going to do it." " You 'd have to if we insisted," said the woman, and the man said, " But what 's your objection to John ? I thought you liked him." " I like him well enough," she said, " but that doesn't mean I want to be with him all the time. A man of sixty ! What sort of life is that for me ? I—oh, I 'm not going to argue." She was silent for a minute. Then she said abruptly, " I 'm going out." And she came swiftly through the door behind which Mr. Prior was standing and went out through the open French window, closing it behind her.

" Damsel in distress, eh ? " said Mr. Prior to himself. " Marrying her off to some gold-encrusted fossil, I suppose. Well, I 'm no knight-errant." And he took two cautious steps toward the window and fell with an almighty crash over a little stand with an aquarium on it.

As he got up he heard chairs pushed back and a bell ringing somewhere. The girl had shut the window, and he spent ten dreadful seconds trying to work the patent catch, and then, as running footsteps seemed to converge on him from all parts of the house, he dashed for a door he had noticed. It gave on a little dim hall. There were three doors, and he ducked through the one on the left just as the one on the right began to open, and found himself three seconds later sitting in some confusion at the foot of the cellar stairs.

But, confusion or no confusion, Mr. Prior couldn't stay there. He got up and advanced through the darkness, waving his hands before him. By great good luck he fell next into the coal-bin. The coal had come in, presumably, through a window He found it and scrambled through, and after another scuffle with a barberry bush came out behind the garage. He opened the door and went in, and the lights of a car that was facing him suddenly went on.

Well, thorns and aquarium water and coal-dust make a poor top-dressing for any gentleman. They had certainly made a bum out of Mr. Prior. " What are you doing here ? " said the girl in the car. " Stand right where you are." " Please, lady," said Mr. Prior, " I wasn't doing any harm. I—I was just looking for something to eat, and if you turn me in they 'll send me to jail." With some idea of cleaning off his face so that he would look more honest, Mr. Prior pulled a wet handkerchief out of his breast-pocket. A goldfish flew out with it, which was lucky for him, for it made the girl laugh. " You didn't get much," she said. " Were you planning to have fish chowder ? "

There were footsteps outside and a voice said, " Miss Carol, have you seen anybody around ? There was a tramp got in the house and escaped through the cellar window." " No," said the girl, " I haven't seen anybody. Did he steal anything, George ? " " Not as far as we know," said the man. " He 's probably gone by now," said the girl. " But you might wait outside until I get down the drive. I don't like tramps around."

Mr. Prior had ducked down between the headlights. The girl got out of the car and opened the door of a closet in the corner of the garage. " I 'm going to lock you in here for a while," she said. " If I find you haven't taken anything I 'll let you go when I get back. Quick ! "

So we will pass over the next hour, for there was nothing in it but Mr. Prior's thoughts, which were painful but not specially interesting. And then the girl came back and let him out and said, " Well, there seems to be nothing missing, so you 'd better beat it." And then she suddenly pointed to his vest and said, " For heaven's sake, where 'd you get that ? " and Mr. Prior looked down and saw his Phi Beta Kappa pin glittering on his besmeared front like a jewel in a pig-pen.

So he stuttered and stammered and finally said it was his. " That 's likely ! " said the girl. " And I thought you were just an unfortunate tramp and now I see you really are a thief." " No, ma'am," said Mr. Prior, " it really is mine, for I went to—well, I would rather not tell you the name of the college, for that past is now gone beyond recall, but it is true I went to it." " Well," said the girl doubtfully, and then she said, " But I just can't understand—you do have some relics of cultured speech. How could you have come down to—to this ? " So there was nothing for Mr. Prior to do but say in a low, shamed voice that it was drink.

Well, for most women there is certainly a phosphorescent glamour about moral decay—provided, of course, that it has begun on a high social level and hasn't yet worked any marked physical alterations. And Mr. Prior was obviously good-looking even under the dirt and scratches. She sat down on the running-board and gave him a lecture.

" No," said Miss Hamilton slowly, " you wouldn't have stolen that face ! "

Mr. Prior enjoyed it very much. The girl was very pretty and she made him feel devilish, and what more can you ask of a girl? It was over much too soon. "Well," she said, getting up, "I don't know why I should try to show you—if you can't see for yourself. You can go right down the drive. They 've stopped hunting for you now and the coast is clear." "Thank you, Miss," said Mr. Prior. "You 're very kind." And he mumbled something to the effect that if perhaps he 'd only had the influence of a good woman in his life—— "No doubt," said the girl coldly, and switched off the car lights and went into the house.

III.

Well, the effect of this second burglary on Mr. Prior was really remarkable. For several days he took pleasure in the simplest things, and every time he thought of the adventure an authentic thrill twanged his spine. A week ago the thought of living alone in the house without servants would have been horrible to him, but he found he was really enjoying it.

But on the third evening he felt restless. It wasn't so much that he was bored as that he felt uneasy. He wanted something and he didn't know what it was. But at least he *wanted* it. And that was all to the good. Perhaps another burglary?

That evening he broke into the house of a Mr. C. W. Dowson and stole a small hooked rug. It was almost too easy, for the servants had gone to the movies and Mr. Dowson was having a fight with his wife, and Mr. Prior roamed over the house at will. Once he fell over a prie-dieu in one of the upper bedrooms, for the Dowsons were very religious people, and he crept trembling into the hall to listen, for the fighting had stopped and Mr. Dowson had shouted, "Who 's there?" But then Mrs. Dowson accused Mr. Dowson of trying to sneak off, and the battle was resumed.

But though Mr. Prior continued to feel alive, the Dowson burglary did not cure his unrest. He tried another burglary, but, with his leg half-way through the second-story window of a Mr. Rufus Blatchford he suddenly decided to give it up, and he turned around and went home. He just wasn't getting anything out of it.

He spent several days in thought after this and finally decided that it was his conscience that was bothering him, for his mind kept coming back to the Hamilton burglary and the little silver box he had stolen. He felt he should return it. You 'd think he 'd have felt the same way about the Dowsons' hooked rug, particularly as it wasn't a very good one, but he didn't.

So in the afternoon he drove over and sent in his name, and when Mrs. Hamilton came down she said, "How do you do, Mr. Prior? You 're a neighbour of ours, I think?" Mr. Prior said, "Yes, and I have come on rather an odd errand. Is this yours?" And he held out the silver box. "Why, yes," said Mrs. Hamilton. "That is, it looks like it, but——" She stopped and called "Carol!" and in a minute the girl came into the room. "This is our neighbour, Mr. Prior, Carol," said Mrs. Hamilton, and the girl smiled and said something, and then her eyes popped open and she stared indignantly at Mr. Prior, who blushed.

But Mrs. Hamilton said, "Carol, you know that little silver box I missed the other day? Didn't you tell me you 'd taken it up to your room?" "It 's up there now," said Miss Hamilton, and Mrs. Hamilton said, "How very queer! But then this one——" "Perhaps I had better explain where I got it," said Mr. Prior hastily. And he went into a long, involved story about waking up with a light flashed in his eyes and pursuing a burglar who, before he jumped through the window, dropped the silver box. "And so," he said, "I called the police and they said yours was the only house where there had been any burglary recently, and so I naturally assumed——. But what an odd coincidence!"

Mrs. Hamilton thought it was odd, but a credulity nourished on popular fiction can take a heavy strain, and Mrs. Hamilton was a great reader. She said, "Carol, go up and get our box. Probably Mr. Prior would like to see how much alike they are. It 's really extraordinary. Oh, dear me, I must fly! I have a meeting at four. So nice to have met you. Mr. Prior."

"And now, perhaps," said Miss Hamilton, "you 'll tell me *why*——?" "Two reasons," said Mr. Prior. "One—I really did want to bring the box back. And two—I wanted to show you that I had given up drink." "Very funny," she said. "And why are you pretending to be Watson Prior?" "I 've been doing that for years," said Mr. Prior. "Very successfully, too. You see, I really believe I am Watson Prior!". "Listen," she said. "You 're cleaner now, but frankly I prefer you as a tramp. I know the Prior house. It has been closed for a month. I drove past it yesterday." "Look," he said, "here 's my wallet—Watson Prior in gold letters—driver's licence—five feet eleven, brown hair, blue eyes, and so on—cheque-book—Watson Prior in gold letters a little larger—receipt for club dues——" "You could have stolen all those," said Miss Hamilton. "Ah! Here 's the thing," said Mr. Prior. "Passport. See the picture? I couldn't have stolen the face." "No," said Miss Hamilton slowly, "you wouldn't have stolen *that* face!"

"Listen," said Mr. Prior eagerly, and he wondered at himself as he did so, for he hadn't felt eagerness for probably fifteen years. "Listen," he said, "I want to explain." And he did. Miss Hamilton took it very quietly. It 's pretty hard to surprise girls nowadays. All she said when he had finished was "Well?"

"Well," said Mr. Prior, "I guess that 's all. I wonder what I do now? Burglary I can't get interested in—it doesn't even scare me." "Isn't there anything that seems romantic?" said Miss Hamilton. "I hesitate to ask personal questions, but isn't there a girl anywhere—a romantic attachment?" "I don't think you hesitate," said Mr. Prior, "but it 's all

(Concluded on page i)

"Oh, you are disgusting—blowing!"

Ghosts !

Enjoy Wills's Gold Flake
The Cigarette with Personality

Wallflowers
Antony Groves-Raines

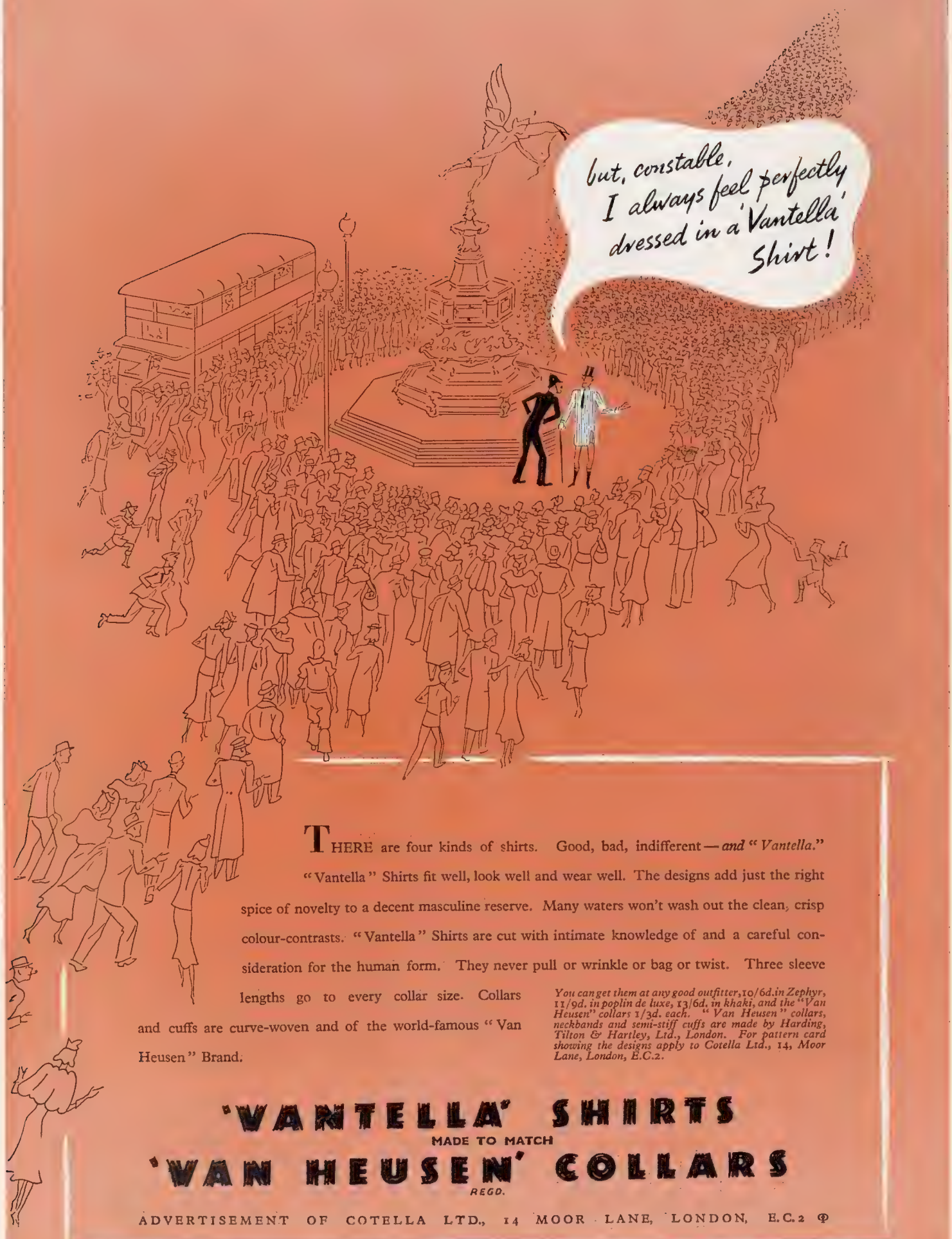
Fathers' Christmas

It's child's-play, really, this business of choosing the right Christmas present for a man. Give him what you like yourself. Give him Johnnie Walker. Such a mellow whisky, so smooth, so finely flavoured, so perfectly blended. Yes, that's the special secret of Johnnie Walker — the *blending* does it!

Give

Johnnie Walker

for Christmas



THERE are four kinds of shirts. Good, bad, indifferent—*and* "*Vantella.*" "Vantella" Shirts fit well, look well and wear well. The designs add just the right spice of novelty to a decent masculine reserve. Many waters won't wash out the clean, crisp colour-contrasts. "Vantella" Shirts are cut with intimate knowledge of and a careful consideration for the human form. They never pull or wrinkle or bag or twist. Three sleeve lengths go to every collar size. Collars and cuffs are curve-woven and of the world-famous "Van Heusen" Brand.

You can get them at any good outfitter, 10/6d. in Zephyr, 11/9d. in poplin de luxe, 13/6d. in khaki, and the "Van Heusen" collars 1/3d. each. "Van Heusen" collars, neckbands and semi-stiff cuffs are made by Harding, Tilton & Hartley, Ltd., London. For pattern card showing the designs apply to Cotella Ltd., 14, Moor Lane, London, E.C.2.

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Poison Pen

By H. T. W. Bousfield

Illustrations by Alex Jardine

I WOULDN'T call it exactly a club, our discussion circle, but it is a group of a few of the more civilised neighbours who meet in each other's houses and have a cup of coffee or maybe a glass of beer, and discuss affairs. I take the *Times* in, and Mrs. Gledbourne takes the *Express*. Mr. Trubshaw has the *News Chronicle* and old Miss Brown reads the *Herald* and the *Daily Mail*. That 's what keeps her blood-pressure up, the doctor says. Fascist and Communist plots are all she can talk about.

Well, anyway, there isn't much to talk about that has any bearing upon local affairs as a rule, because Sibthorpe is a quiet sort of place. You can't blame us for speculating a bit about strangers, though.

Don't think we gossip ; we don't. We just think. And we 've got a right to. When strangers come to the neighbourhood we just naturally look them over, and if it seems they 've come here for some good and reasonable purpose, they 're welcome.

We don't hold with secrecy.

So when old Admiral Wilson came to live at the Grange we took an interest in the old gentleman, as neighbours should, and we weren't going to ignore his affairs as if they couldn't be any concern of ours. In a small community everybody ought to hang together.

So when the Admiral was settled in, Jane—that 's my sister—went and called, because I 've been lieutenant and quartermaster.

She got some tea, though they weren't what you might call gushing, and she found out that the Admiral had come down to the country to spend his declining days and (if you ask me) to keep away from the temptations of London. He was looked after by his niece, a bold but handsome young woman called Mrs. Jefferson, whose husband was in some Colonial service abroad.

My sister didn't like Mrs. Jefferson from the first minute she set eyes on her, but you know what women are when it comes to prejudice about any one of their own sex. Personally, I considered her a fine woman—and I still do—with a lot of reddy-brown hair and fine eyes. And she was a good horsewoman.

They 're putting up week-end houses and cottages even round Sibthorpe, and personally I never saw any reason why Mrs. Jefferson should not start a livery stable and hire one or two old nags out to visitors. Anyway, she raised quite a business in that line, and I 'm told she didn't do so badly.

Folks would come down, particularly in the summer (we 're not far from the sea), with their children, and Mrs. Jefferson used to hire out a pony or two and make quite a bit.

She would ride anything ; I 'll say that for her. She had naturally good hands and the something that makes animals do what you want for you. Many a time I 've met her when I 've been hobbling around, and she always had a smile that did me good and made me wish I was ten years younger. Her husband didn't make much money, by all accounts, wherever he was, in Nairobi or Bangkok or Timbuctoo, and looking after the old Admiral wasn't enough for any young woman of spirit.

She stayed with him and looked after him because he hadn't anybody else, and she hadn't enough money on her own to hack about ; and you can't get much hunting free of charge in these days.

People who had nothing better to do than talk said that she neglected him. But he 'd got plenty of money, and surely he did not need a nurse ? I used to say that she cheered him up, for a more disagreeable, fat, useless old survival I never wish to see. I only spoke to him once, and that was because he said my chickens had got into his kitchen garden. And the fence between was his affair. The lawyer said so.

They 'd stayed in our village six months before we even began to know much about them. Mrs. Howard, who keeps the post-office, said not many letters came from Africa, or wherever it was Jefferson was stationed, and whenever she got the chance to read a postcard it had something to do with the need of money to develop the estate he was working on.

You could easily see that the old Admiral wasn't one to make very free with his money. Although he was rich, he used to keep such a watch on his head gardener that the poor man told Simpson up at the Wheatsheaf that if he so much as chewed a leaf of parsley absent-mindedly it would surely be noticed.

That sort of man easily gets a bad name. He may have been just a kindly creature who was cautious. But he made plenty of trouble if his niece did not put in an account every week of the fodder for her ponies that she used to hire out. And when some little repairs had to be done to the stables, she had to pay to make them better than they had ever been for fifty years.

And I got that myself from Hopkins, who did the work.

I expect it was our fine air and the fine food we can grow in these parts (if you can pay for it) that got the Admiral's liver going above itself. We could all see he was getting even fatter, and his face was as red as the wattles of one of my own turkeys.

He used to stump up and down, looking so like a retired Admiral that some of us felt he was making the village a laughing-stock. And then he fell ill, and old Dr. Greaves, a sound man if ever there was one, put him on a diet straight away.

" No red wine," said Dr. Greaves—we had it from the daily maid, whose father is head man at the Priory Farm—" just a little whisky, if you must have stimulant, before going to bed. Daily exercise is essential. Do you ride ? You do. Hack for an hour every day between breakfast and lunch. I am sure your niece will be able to find you a suitable mount."

The Admiral's first attempts at hacking weren't very successful. Not that he couldn't ride. On the contrary, there was nothing of the horse-marine about

The Admiral made plenty of trouble if his niece did not put in an account every week of the fodder for her ponies

I wouldn't call it exactly a club, our discussion circle, but a gro

him ; only he was fat as a pig, and his niece's ponies were meant for boys and girls. It was cruel to see him bumping about on a poor dumb animal that was breaking its heart at the job.

But he kept on with it for a while, and there were sore backs in his stables, and harder words than usual with Mrs. Jefferson. And there were sadder letters, so they said, from the West Coast or wherever it was that Jefferson was trying to earn a living and panting for capital to develop the estate or whatever it was.

People even used to ask *me* whether the Admiral was leaving his money to his niece ; as if it had anything to do with me ! But we all knew that there wasn't any other relative he could leave it to. Probably it would have to go to her automatically.

Not that it was any affair of ours. He was by no means neighbourly. Mrs. Jefferson therefore wasn't expected to do more than pass the time of day. She did that, and I liked her.

It was the postman who said how tired the old boy was of the tame hacks that Mrs. Jefferson had collected to let out to visitors, and he said Mrs. Jefferson had been told straight out that if she couldn't produce a horse with good manners and a bit of spirit in it, his lordship would take all the stables away from her, shut down her little enterprise, and crack her little nest-egg once and for all.

It was none of our business, but we were sympathetic, I hope, and I sent word to the poor young woman that the horse-fair at Flintham was opening the following week, and maybe she might find something suitable—a weight-carrier, which was what was wanted.

I 'm not a very active man, what with my injury and all, but I know, of course, the people round about, and I asked one or two of my friends to look after poor Mrs. Jefferson at the Flintham Horse Fair. I said she wanted a weight-carrier who was well-mannered but by no means a slug. I said price wasn't so much the consideration as performance. I didn't ask and I didn't want a penny more than the usual fair percentage.

I only asked the few who were friends of mine, remember. I couldn't go round to every Tom, Dick and Harry. Perhaps it would have been better if I had done more than send a message—gone up to the Manor and seen Mrs. Jefferson and talked the whole thing over. But you see, she was a stranger in Sibthorpe, and I might have found it difficult to explain how I knew of her troubles.

Anyway, the old Admiral clearly commissioned her to buy on his behalf a horse worthy of his dignity, and she did so.

She came back with a bay gelding that looked worth every penny of the hundred guineas she 'd paid for it. There was a restless spark in its eye, maybe, but its manners were perfect.

Mrs. Jefferson understood horses. She 'd have coined money, it 's my belief, if she had made horses, and not her husband, her career. But you can't argue with people, let alone women.

The old Admiral liked the looks of it. He was pleased, they said. " Good for you, Gloria," he said. " Yes, it trots and canters and walks. I expected you

a few neighbours. . . . Don't think we gossip; we don't

to come back with another museum relic. Well, I 've underrated you, my dear. I 'm a bit stiff; I 'll let you give it a run before breakfast to-morrow, and then it shall take me for a mild canter round the paddock."

I had a look at that horse. It had a peculiar trick with its near-fore that was just, as you might say, a gesture. But I 'd never seen that delicate little flick in action before, except in the case of one horse that belonged to a friend of mine, and it wasn't a bay gelding, but a grey gelding, and it wasn't a well-mannered horse. It was a man-eater: no more, no less. Some people can ride that type of skin—and, of course, some people can tame tigers.

I wondered a bit—and who wouldn't? And I made up my mind to get in touch with Bob Sheldon who had had the grey. I remember I told my sister about the coincidence.

It was such a coincidence that I thought I 'd go down and see, casual like, how the Admiral got on even after his niece had let the animal out, but I hung about and nothing happened until the gardener came along and said the Admiral wasn't feeling well.

So no riding that day.

Next, if you please, foot-and-mouth was reported on the Priory Farm, and we had a stop order. If it had come a bit earlier that horse would never have got here, and there 'd have been the saving of plenty of trouble. But the ways of Providence are inscrutable.

Foot-and-mouth took everybody's attention up. It spread, and then came the slaughtering order that put half of us out of business for the time being.

I don't know if you 've ever seen one of those slaughtering orders, but I can tell you it 's really tragic.

The poor beasts, instead of being killed for food in a decent manner, are just put out of the way as painlessly as possible and their carcases burnt, for all the world like a great burnt-offering to some heathen god.

I managed to get along to see it, and I was just passing the time of day with a few friends when who should come along but the Admiral on his new bay gelding.

He wasn't having too happy a time, we could see that. But to do him justice, he wasn't the sort of old gentleman to admit it. He came along at a bumpy canter, and some of us saluted him, and then before you could say "Knife" the wind brought the smoke of the burning carcases over his way, and the gelding took one leap in the air and was off.

I 'm afraid some ignorant youths made rude noises and shouted "Whoa, Skipper!" Whether that made things worse or not, I don't know. But I do know that if ever I 've seen a mad horse, it was that gelding. You 'd think it was trying to fly with its legs.

Well, it didn't fly long. There 's a deep ditch at the bottom end of the long meadow where the burnings were going on, and into it the thing went like a bullet. And over it went

We saw it kicking and kicking and kicking, but it didn't get up, and we saw nothing else moving. So some of us

Poison Pen *(Continued from page 71)*

went along—two hundred yards away it was, I should judge—and there was the Admiral, dead as mutton, with his neck broken and the rest of him messed about a bit, and the horse with a broken near-fore.

We got the body away and someone sent somebody for a hurdle, and then up came Mrs. Jefferson on one of her old ponies. She saw what had happened before anybody could break the news to her, and she let out a terrible scream and started creating something awful. Then, just like turning off a tap, she stopped and got quite calm and capable. Just took charge.

"Take my uncle up to the house," she said, as businesslike as you could wish. "Send for the doctor, and somebody get somebody to shoot the horse. It must be put out of its misery," she said.

Well, that was reasonable, too. The body was taken away, young George Prentiss ran off for Dr. Greaves, and Dr. Harper, the vet., very mercifully put that bay gelding out of his misery. But one thing happened next that made people afterwards think a bit. Mrs. Jefferson called for volunteers and paid them well to drag the carcase over to the fires and burn it.

Why burn it? That was sheer waste. Of course, there were some who said at the time that she couldn't bear the idea of making money out of the thing that had killed her dear uncle. But was he such a dear uncle?

I couldn't help thinking that the way the old Admiral had behaved over Mrs. Jeferson's husband's estate out in Africa or wherever it was didn't point to too much affection, and a healthy young horse isn't without all value even when it's dead.

So why burn it?

It was my sister who made a very sensible comment.

"See here," she said to me that afternoon. "Is it difficult to dye a horse?"

"How do you mean?" I said. "Who wants to dye a horse?" "Well," she said, "if you bought a dangerous horse that was grey, and you didn't want people to know you'd bought it, could you dye it all over, brownish like?"

"You mean," I said, "that bay gelding with the very action of the man-eating grey that old Bob Sheldon used to have?"

"Could you dye it bay?" says my sister. "And if you had and it did its work, and you burnt it, could anyone ever prove it was dyed?"

I whistled. "You've got it, I do believe," I said. "You could not, of course. But I'll write to Bob and ask was he at Flintham and did he sell the brute."

So I wrote, and why shouldn't I? One has a civic duty to perform. I didn't get an answer before the inquest, when a verdict of "Accidental Death" was returned, but by the time I did hear from Bob we all learned that the Admiral had left his fortune to his niece and she had already sent a telegram, that Mrs. Howard said was positively indecently cheerful, to her husband in Timbuctoo (or wherever it was), saying that happy days had come again and there was nothing to worry about any more.

And the poor man hardly cold in his coffin!

Well, Bob said no, he hadn't been at Flintham, but he'd sold the grey three months before to a stranger, and what was I asking about, anyway?

It's these films, you know, that get people thinking when they'd be far happier by doing nothing of the kind. I'm sure it was the films that sent me over to Flintham—waste of money though it was—to ask if anyone could tell me who sold a bay gelding to Mrs. Jefferson.

Well, believe it or not, it was a stranger. Nobody seemed to know who he was. The landlord of the house I usually use when I'm over in Flintham said he'd never seen him before, but he thought he was an Irishman. He'd come into the bar, said he'd had a good day, and he spent a very respectful bit of money.

I told my sister, who was very interested in all this, and "Yes, I bet he did," she says, and she looked solemn.

And then she suggested that I should go up and pay my respects to Mrs. Jefferson and express my condolences and ask whether, maybe, she had considered bringing an action against whoever had sold her the bay gelding for damages for not declaring it to be a dangerous animal—seeing that the old Admiral was an experienced horseman, and so on.

Well, I did, but I got no change. She seemed almost affronted, and before I knew I was walking down the drive feeling I hadn't been wanted.

I told my sister, and good, Christian woman that she is, she said:

"John, I never liked Mrs. Jefferson, as I told you, from the first minute I set eyes on her. But I have no doubt the old Admiral put a sore temptation in her way with his meannesses and his temper. Is that," she says, "any reason why she should take his life? It's quite clear to me that, being a woman who could do almost anything with any animal, she planned and plotted to get the old man on a beast that she knew would throw him one day and probably kill him. She bought that horse, John, with murder in her heart, and it is our duty to see that she does not go unpunished."

Well, what could I or anyone say? It sounded reasonable to me then, and it sounds reasonable to me at this moment.

I only said: "Be careful how you go about it; I'm sorry for Mrs. Jefferson," I said.

And she said: "Yes, I know you are."

You can blame me and you can blame Jane, but you must blame the police as well. Personally, the anonymous postcard or so that Jane (it seems) sent to Mrs. Jefferson I consider a mistake. A kindly warning—but a mistake.

Mrs. Jefferson was questioned. A hunt was made by the police for the man who had sold the horse to her at Flintham Fair.

And the papers fairly buzzed with the story; Sibthorpe was in the news, and no error.

Everything went, in fact, as you'd expect it to, if you're a reader or a follower of films. Mrs. Jefferson had every motive to get rid of her uncle. He had been urged to take riding exercise. He did not like his niece's ponies. She is sent to buy a livelier animal.

She sees the chance at a country horse fair of buying a perfect devil that no one except a born horsemaster like herself can control. She buys it, disguises it, and in due course puts her uncle up, and it kills him. As there's a great funeral-pile of foot-and-mouth cattle, she burns the horse that did her dirty work.

Now who can prove it's been dyed when it's all burnt up? No one could have suspected anything if I hadn't seen the brute, and recognised just that little funny gesture with its near-fore.

There were many who did not scruple to say that Jane and I had performed an

(Concluded on page ii)

"Stay as you are, Sir; you're just perfect"

Meerkämper

***The sun sets** over Davos valley and the hamlet of Monstein*

Snow Fall

When flowers and leaves are fallen, winter covers the earth with a new white blooming

"We would never have dreamt of having Christmas without snow in those days," says Lady Addle of Eigg in her further memoirs (p. 8), but this light-headed grande dame says little more of the winter's loveliest feature, her concern being almost entirely with interiors. But how right she is (in her own phrasing)! Snow is the redeeming feature of the cold; it is the beautiful side of the same phenomenon whose reverse is frozen pipes and chillblains. In distant perspective it is pleasing enough, merely by turning a varied landscape into two-colour relief: but its effect at close-up is often startlingly lovely. On the next two pages are studies of snow's work taken by Meerkämper, the Davos photographer, in the valley of his home which is shown above. Those who usually plan in autumn their visits to their own favourite snow fairyland were wondering this autumn when they would again see Davos, Villars, St. Moritz, St. Anton, Muerren, and those others of happy memory

Snow Fall (Continued)

Weighed down by the tracery that beautifies it, this tree bows westwards

A fir crouches under its blanket, like an old-time photographer

Sun and snow combine to make an undistinguished bush as lovely as a rare underwater plant

Photographs by Meerkämper

Christmas cake landscape: *a little church in icing sugar, an enamelled sky, crystalline snow—is the effect of the picture of the Frauenkirchli, near Davos*

Christmas Tales

The Ballet Takes and Transforms the Children of its Sister, Pantomime

Photographs by Anthony

Red Riding Hood and the Wolf
Jean Bedells and Frank Staff in "The Sleeping Princess"

The White Cat and Puss-in-Boots
Molly Brown and Frederick Ashton in "The Sleeping Princess"

Columbine, lovely and wayward, and the darting, mischievous Harlequin have mimed and prinked and danced their way through the variegated pattern of their story a thousand thousand times since their Commedia dell' Arte days. In England they were long ago captured for the pantomime, with love-sick, frustrated Pierrot, who, by a strange trick of theatrical fate, thereupon set a new fashion for concert parties and fancy-dress balls. Then came the Russians and their ballet. Columbine and Harlequin—and Pierrot—were exquisitely transformed into dancers by the genius of Fokine. His *Carnaval* is, for good or ill, part of the repertoire of almost every company we know. Red Riding Hood and the Wolf became dancers too, in one of the greatest of Russian ballet fairy-tales, *La Belle au Bois Dormant*. And the White Cat and Puss-in-Boots dance their delicately fractious flirtation as another of the many "pantomime" episodes in the same work, which, as *The Sleeping Princess*, was revived at Sadler's Wells last spring

Columbine and Harlequin

Mia Slavenska and Igor Youskevitch in "Carnaval"

Happy Christmas

(Continued from page 18)

Katherine could not be said to be enjoying her Christmas Day. Presently she dozed, and woke up only for tea, during which she was completely silent; and shortly afterwards, complaining of her headache, she went up to her room to rest before dinner. She was furious with herself, for it is most humbling to be forced to admit that one is consumed with jealousy of a competitor who is, in one's own opinion, an unworthy antagonist. Sleep would not come to her, and after a restless hour she finally abandoned the effort and decided to read in her dressing-gown by the fire until it was time to have her bath and dress. Having made this decision, she crossed to the washstand on which stood a bowl of clouded rose-coloured glass, and picking up the jug which was its companion, she was pouring out the cold water into a tumbler, for she had thought of taking yet another aspirin, when, inspired with malicious life, it slipped from her fingers and lay shattered on the floor, a pattern of jagged and starry splinters that sparkled in the firelight.

She looked with resignation at the havoc she had wrought, finding a certain twisted satisfaction in the unity of the misfortunes that had dogged her throughout the day. She shrugged herself into her dressing-gown and padded off to the bathroom which she shared with Audrey, intending to postpone her reading until later. Wallowing in the steaming, scented water, a fresh wave of indignation swept over her as she caught sight of her magnificent gift to that intolerable young woman, where it squatted fatly on the low, white-painted table; mutely insulting.

Audrey must on no account be left a clear field, Katherine determined. She must *not* be given a whole day alone with Ashley—come what may!

"The . . . *bay tree*," Katherine muttered savagely. If only Audrey would catch a cold or break out with boils or . . . and Katherine suddenly had an idea. A wonderful idea. . . .

Abruptly she turned off the tap with her toes and almost jumped out of the bath, and, swathing herself in the large, thick bath-sheet, hurried back to her own room. There followed a good deal of activity, and of coming and going between bedroom and bathroom, until a few minutes later she summoned a house-maid to clear away the remains of the smashed jug "before someone hurts themselves," as Katherine so thoughtfully, if ungrammatically, put it. She was the first in the drawing-room. Actually, the bridge was still in progress when she arrived.

LATER on, there was a lengthy hiatus before the butler came in to announce dinner, and to deliver a message from Audrey that she wasn't feeling well and so had gone to bed. Ashley's mother showed an instant and natural concern, but when she declared her intention of ministering to the invalid, the butler respectfully interrupted her by declaring that "Miss Frazer had expressed a definite wish that no one was to bother about her, and that she would be quite all right again in the morning."

But the next day Ashley hunted alone, and Audrey was, in fact, confined to her bed until the end of her visit. Katherine, greatly heartened by her rival's enforced absence, was soon once again at the top of her form, and the week before Easter her engagement to Ashley was announced.

And so it was, indeed, a remarkable piece of good fortune that the broken glass of the water-jug and the pink crystals of the bath-salts happened to be of so similar a hue as to render them undetectable the one from the other.

THE END.

Lord Smith's Candid Diary

(Continued from page 30-32)

His mind revolted from this second accusation. She always fussed around him like an old hen, he thought fiercely. He was sick of it! And on the heels of that thought, another: she pulled me through. The doctor said so. She saved my life.

Profoundly stirred, Lord Smith rose and paced the hearthrug, his hands clasped behind his back. He could not accept the evidence of known facts, yet he could not reject it. He sought for evasions, extenuations, for arguments to put himself in the right again. They came, but would not stand up to examination.

For two hours he paced the room, to sink at last, wearily, into a chair.

He had bullied Foster. Bullied him. It was he who was the coward. He had ignored May, and, worse, been deliberately unkind to her. He had forgotten what she had done for him. And to these two he owed his life. That was the kind of man he was. He had blown himself up like a balloon, to be somebody in his own eyes, but that was what he was—dirt, dirt.

He felt tears in his hot eyes.

There came a tap on the door, and it opened. He did not look up. He was sitting leaning forward, with his hands clenched hard over his knees, staring at the embers of the neglected fire. Lady Smith came to him.

"Why, what's the matter, Alfie—Alfred?" she said.

"Alfie's good enough for me," said Lord Smith, without moving or looking up.

"And you've let your fire go out! That's what comes of saying you mustn't be disturbed! Why didn't you ring for it to be made up?"

"I was thinking," said Lord Smith.

"Well, it's no use thinking and letting the fire go out," said Lady Smith briskly. "Now you buck yourself up and don't get the mopes, because I'm sure there's no need. And I'll have the fire seen to." And she pressed the stud beside the fireplace.

Suddenly she made an audible intake of breath, sharply. She bent and took hold of his shoulders.

"Why, Alfie! Alfie! You're crying! Alfie, darling, what is it? What is it, my pet? Alfie, tell me what it is!"

He leaned his face forward on to her shoulder, like an unhappy small boy, and sobbed without a word.

"Down again—then it's your turn!"

"YES," said Lord Smith later, "it was the diary that did it. It's all right being honest about other people—that's fine, that is, but there's a catch in it. If you once start being really honest, you begin to see what you amount to yourself, that's what happens. And you don't feel so good. Now I wonder if that chap knew that when he told me about keeping a diary. Do you think he did, May?"

Lady Smith wound her arms round him as if she would never unwind them.

"I don't know," she said happily. "And I don't care!"

"I'll raise Foster's wages," murmured Lord Smith, with difficulty, within her embrace. "Good chap, Foster, and more expenses with another baby. Yes, I'll raise his wages!"

THE END.

Anthony

The Party Frock: a Study of Irina Baronova in "Cotillon"

Lady Addle Remembers Christmas *(Continued from page 14)*

perceptive for a girl of fifteen, and when, a year or two before, during a game of hide-and-seek, I had run into the pantry on Christmas Eve and found a footman laying out the famous red robe " for Mr. Turbot," I had begun to suspect that perhaps my childish belief was a myth. But whatever the shock was to me and my brothers and sisters, the effect on the two princes was electrical. The Nougat had now recovered, and both boys—not being familiar with English customs and evidently thinking that such a splendidly apparelled person must be the head of the house—drew themselves up smartly and clicked their heels and gave a low bow to Turbot, following him out of the room with every sign of delight and gratitude.

After that we children were sent to bed, so I only know the rest of the story at second-hand. But when I look back on the whole thing I reflect that a guardian angel must have been hovering near, to see that one of England's great families came to no dishonour. For there is no doubt that it might have been very serious indeed if the young princes had spent that night in the scullery. Wars have resulted from less. But luckily about twenty minutes after their departure with Turbot, the cabman, growing impatient at the long delay, made his way to the front door and announced that he had the young gentlemen's luggage. The trunks were then brought in, with the royal Double Vultures of Montenegro painted on them, and my parents at once realised the footman's grave error—he was instantly dismissed, of course—and hastened to send for the princes, who were thereafter installed in the royal suite, which was always kept ready prepared against any emergency such as this.

The Nougat in 1895

All 's well that ends well, as our immortal Shakespeare says, and we had the most delightful Christmas imaginable with the two princes, who proved to be full of fun and good spirits and rapidly adjusted themselves to our English ways, so it is good to think that we made those two little strangers feel really at home during that happy season. Indeed, Mipsie, who, even at that early age, showed promise of those qualities of womanly sympathy and tenderness which later on in life won all hearts, was so concerned lest the Nougat—who, by the way, was the more handsome and attractive of the two—should faint again, that she hardly left his side the whole time, and this charming friendship was renewed years later after her marriage to Oxo Brisket had turned out such a sad failure, when she met the prince again on a yachting trip in the Mediterranean and found him still the same charming, generous person, and by then, of course, enormously rich.

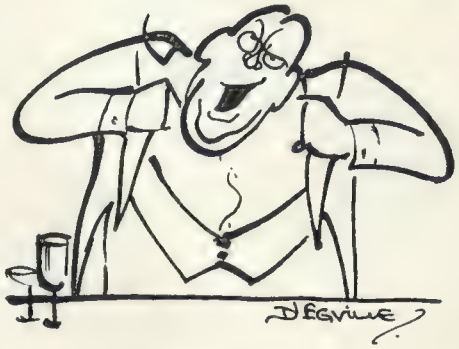
The only thing that was somewhat awkward about that pleasant visit was that the two princes never seemed quite to grasp who Papa was, and persisted in thinking that Turbot was Lord Coot, so that every time he came into the room they sprang to their feet and bowed, which caused us all no little embarrassment and naturally annoyed Papa. However, it was not thought wise to disillusion them in view of the first evening's unfortunate mistake. The interesting thing is that when writing to express thanks for the boys' visit, the Great Moc especially mentioned that first night and the delightful welcome and fatherly kindness of Lord Coot, which shows, I think, in a wonderful way how servants in those good old days absorbed the qualities of the truly great from their employers.

THE END.

On Their Feet

Accustomed as you are to public speaking, you will not fail to recognise four species of homo postprandialis, as seen

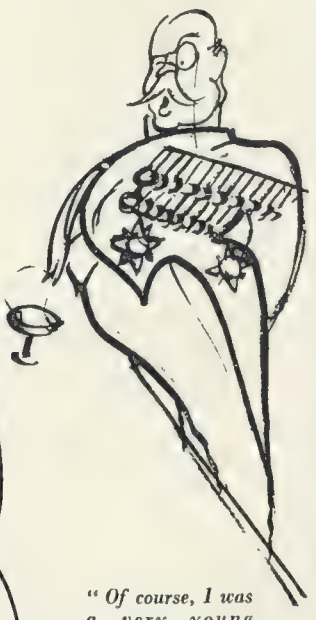
by D'Egville



" If I remember rightly, it was a Tuesday in 1880, or it may have been 1881"

" I was, of course, astounded that the honour of proposing this toast should be conferred upon me"

" I do not wish to stand between you and the speaker of the evening, but I would be failing in my duty if . . ."



" Of course, I was a very young officer at the time"

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THE LUGGAGE PROBLEM SOLVED WITH A

HILLMAN MINX

Susan and Father Christmas

(Continued from page 40)

Metaphorically speaking, the atmosphere of the house was thick with reindeers, Mrs. Ramsay reflected fretfully.

Feeling better, she helped herself to another glass of sherry. Yes, Nannie would have to go. Already in Mrs. Ramsay's thoughts the break had been made, and she saw the future as an uncluttered landscape, hygienically bright as an Alpine meadow, across which she and Susan ran hand-in-hand, miraculously of an age, telling each other everything, having fun. She felt warm and brave and ready to go upstairs now and tackle Nannie; but on second thought it might be kinder to wait until the holidays were over. Let them enjoy Christmas—this last Christmas, Mrs. Ramsay decided contentedly—in peace.

WHEN she went up to say good-night to Susan, the child was already lying in bed, talking quietly to the old blue bear that she cherished stubbornly in preference to the amusing peasant dolls her father had brought her from Yugoslavia last summer. Nannie had switched off the light and gone into the day nursery. Mrs. Ramsay knew that children are only adults in miniature and that their unsupervised conversation is often instructive, and therefore she paused at the door, listening. Susan was crooning in a smug voice, "There 's no such person as Father Christmas, *really*, darling—it 's only me what fills your stocking, stoopid." Then she spoke for the blue bear coldly, "I'm surprised at an old woman like you, making up such ridic'lous stories," and the bed jiggled, and the empty stocking tied to the rail capered up and down with Susan's laughter.

Mrs. Ramsay suddenly felt uncertain. Things might not work out so beautifully after all, even without Nannie, who at the moment was comfortably rocking and listening to herald angels on the radio, unconscious that they packed a nasty punch in their tidings for her this season of peace and goodwill to all men.

THE END.

What the Doctor Ordered

(Continued from page 63)

right. No," he said, thinking about Miss Vetch, "I can't seem to feel the pull of any romantic attachment. In fact, I don't quite understand what is meant by romance. But there 's one thing you can tell me," he went on. "Why did you tell your mother you had taken that box to your room?"

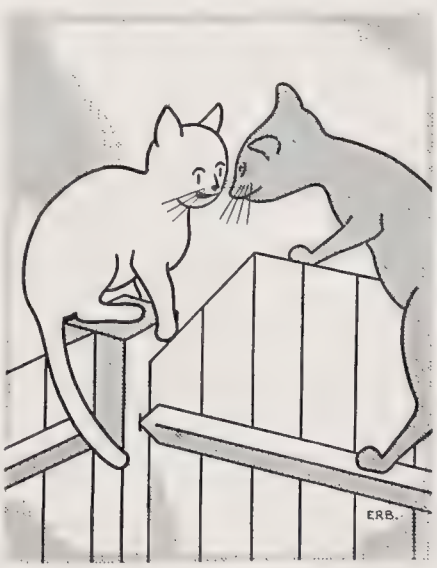
Well, Miss Hamilton looked as if she were going to blush, but I can't for the life of me tell you whether she did it deliberately or not. "I didn't want to get the police after you," she said. "I thought you ought to have a chance. I guess I was sorry for you." "I don't see why you can't go right on being sorry for me," said Mr. Prior. "Only on different grounds." "No," she said, "I don't think I can." And when he asked her why, she said, "Because I don't believe it. Well, yes—I do believe your story. But I don't believe you 're not enjoying life." "Well, I 'm not," said Mr. Prior. And then he looked puzzled, and said, "Why, yes, I am, too!"

"Look here," said Miss Hamilton, "nobody knows but you whether you are or not, and frankly I doubt if anybody else cares. How about extroverting a little and playing a couple of sets of tennis?" "You 'll really let me stay and play tennis with you?" said Mr. Prior, and she said, "Why not? I 've nothing to do this afternoon." So she got him a pair of her father's shoes and they played two sets and came back to the terrace and had a drink. And then Mr. Prior went home with blisters on his heels but with joy in his heart.

Now, although Mr. Prior was so exclusively occupied with watching the fluctuations of his interest in life, he was yet able to realise that Miss Hamilton liked him, and so during the next two weeks he saw a good deal of her And each time his interest in life went to a new high. It was plain she had succeeded where crime had failed. And he thought, "I ought to be with her all the time. But then we 'd have to be married. Well, why not?" So one evening when he had driven her home after the theatre he asked her about it.

They were sitting in the car, and Miss Hamilton laughed. She laughed harder than Mr. Prior thought necessary, but at last she stopped and said, "No, Watson. You haven't a romantic mind. I couldn't marry a man without a romantic mind." "Is that why you wouldn't marry John?" said Mr. Prior angrily. "John?" she said, and he said, "Yes, John." And he told her what he had overheard the night he broke into her house.

"But, Watson!" cried Miss Hamilton. "You *have* got a romantic mind! Poor old Uncle John! He 's my uncle—he invited me to take a trip around the world. That 's what we were rowing about. Imagine being able to weave a romance about Uncle John!" "Well, if I 'm so romantic," said Mr. Prior, "why won't you marry me?" "Why won't I marry you?" she burst out. "Because you 're a mental cripple and all you want is a crutch. Because you think I 'm good for you—like medicine. Because I don't love you. Do you want any more reasons? Oh, go away!" And she jumped out of the car.



"I 'll devote one of my lives to you!"

But Mr. Prior caught her. "Just a minute, Carol," he said quietly, "and then I 'll go. I 've put this thing all wrong. It isn't an interest in life I want to marry. It 's you." And he went on to develop this. He made a darn good speech.

But Miss Hamilton was still mad. "That 's just swell," she said. "I 'd like to marry you to show you how wrong you are. Why, I bet I could bore you to death in a week! Well, are you enjoying life now?" "No!" shouted Mr. Prior. "You know damn well I 'm not! Will you quit harping on that?" "Let me go!" yelled Miss Hamilton, and Mr. Prior yelled back. "I will not! I love you, you darn little fool!"

And the front door opened and Mrs. Hamilton's voice said, "Children! Please! What on earth . . ." And then after a minute she said, "Well, really!" and went back into the house. And Miss Hamilton stopped kissing Mr. Prior and said, "Gosh, Watson! Do you really?" and Mr. Prior said, "Sure. I just found out. But don't waste time." And he kissed her some more.

So they were married and I 'd like to say that they lived happily ever after, but, of course, they didn't, for the boredom of security would get Mr. Prior every now and then, and his zest-for-life curve would take a nose-dive. But experience had taught him how to correct this. For, since an interest in life grows out of the effort to get security, it doesn't flourish in security. So he would sneak off and do a little burglary, and that usually fixed him up. Of course, Mrs. Prior got bored sometimes, too. But she didn't seem to mind so much. I guess women don't.

THE END

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OUR ADVERTISERS' ANNOUNCEMENTS

Many of our readers will realise that this Christmas Number was planned several months ago. Some sections were already on the press by the first week in September, and therefore, whilst every effort was made to insert all corrections and changes up to and including the time of closing for press, readers are asked to recognise that in the intervening weeks circumstances may have arisen which might affect prices, and other details relating to our advertisers' merchandise.

Gloag's Whisky

We have been asked to state that Messrs. Matthew Gloag's advertisement which appears on page 81 was prepared in July of this year.

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Great Britain 3½d. Abroad 3½d. Canada 1½d.

PRINTED IN ENGLAND by THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS & SKETCH, LTD., Milford Lane, Strand, London, W.C.2, and Published by ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPERS, LTD., at 32-34, St. Bride Street, London, E.C.4—FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1939. Entered as Second-Class Matter at the New York (N.Y.) Post Office. American Agents: International News Company New York. Sole Agents for South Africa: Central News Agency, Limited.

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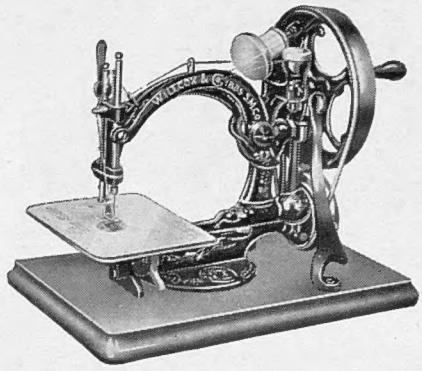

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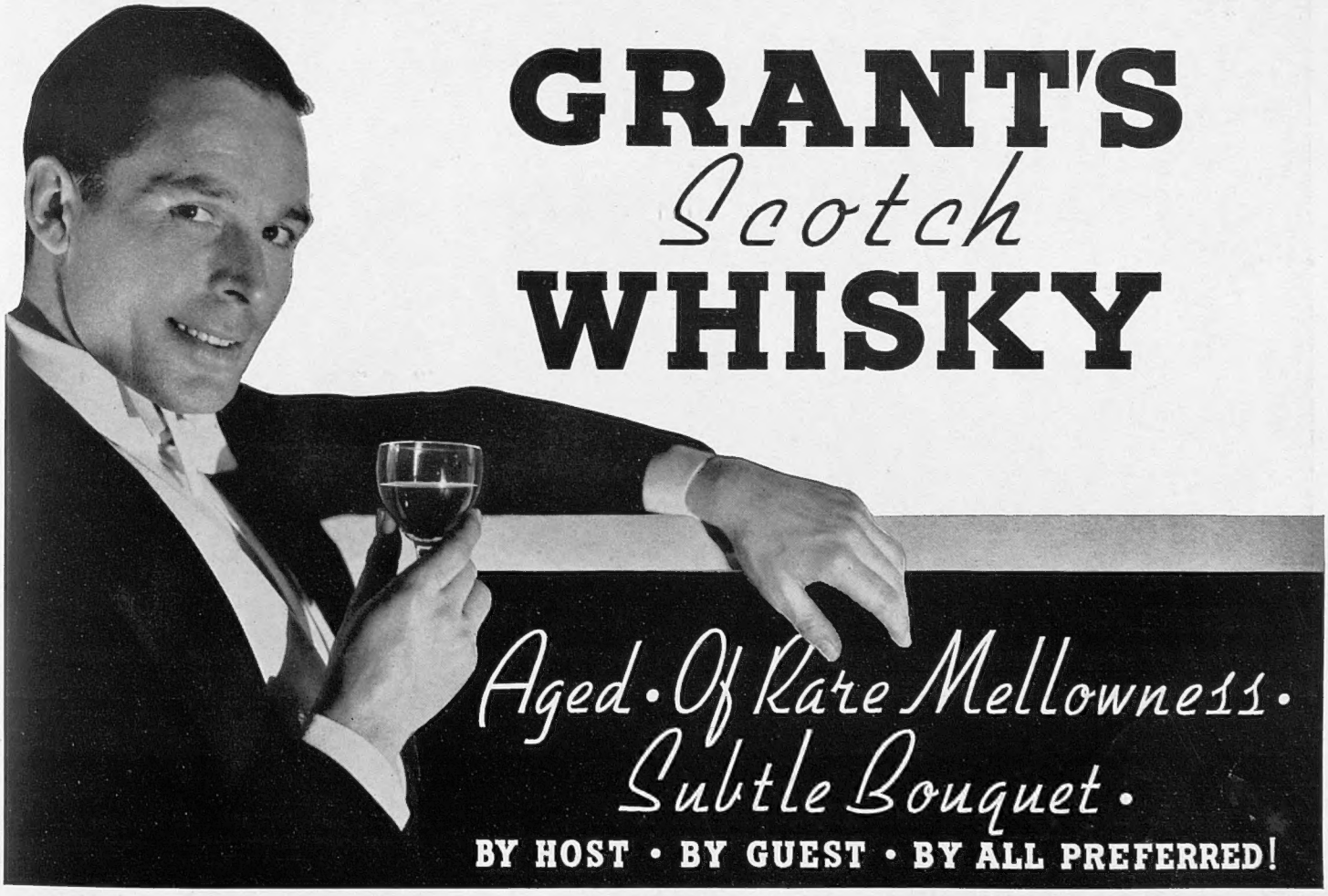

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